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# An Inscribed Set of Five “Dhyāni”-Buddhas from the Palace Museum, Peking

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## Abstract:

A complete set of bronze images of the five Tathāgatas (or “Dhyāni”-Buddhas) from Pāla Times, stored unnoticed for a long time in the Palace Museum in Peking, is discussed iconographically and their inscriptions are, for the first time, read and interpreted. This allows for important insights into the interrelation between Maṇḍalas and images, particularly because the donor Yaśodeva, a Śrāmaṇera, expresses not only his wishes associated with his pious gift, but also records the names of individual Buddhas and had besides their Mudrās also their Vāhanas depicted. In two appendices, the history of the term “Dhyāni”-Buddha is briefly traced and attention is drawn to some (occasionally unrecognized) examples of the five Tathāgatas preserved in stone sculptures.

## Keywords:

Pāla-sculpture, Five Tathāgatas (“Dhyāni”-Buddhas), iconography, Maṇḍalas, votive inscriptions.

## Introduction by Luo Wenhua and Ruan Li

There are two accession numbers for a Group of Five Tathāgata images all measuring 24.2 cm in height at the Palace Museum, namely Lü 1253 and *gu* 202004 1-5/5.<sup>1</sup> These numbers tell us two things:

1. This set of statues belonged to the collections of the Qing court. They entered the court collection no later than 1911, when Pu Yi (1906-1967), the last emperor of the Qing Dynasty, abdicated and left the Forbidden City. Since then, all the imperial collections have become property of the state and have been kept intact in the Forbidden City. After the establishment of the Palace Museum in 1925, an inventory of the furnishings in every hall of the Forbidden City was carried out from June 26<sup>th</sup> 1925 to January 28<sup>th</sup> 1926. The number Lü 1253 was given to a set of “Thirteen Bronze Buddhas with wooden screens and pedestals”<sup>2</sup> preserved in the hall of Mental

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<sup>1</sup> The group of Five Tathāgata images has been published several times. Luo Wenhua (ed.): *Iconography and Style: The Tibetan Buddhist Statues of the Palace Museum*, Beijing: The Forbidden City Publishing House, 2002, pp. 56–57, 62–63, 66–67, 70–71, 92–95; plates 6, 9, 11, 13, 24; Wang Jiapeng (ed.): *Buddhist Statues of Tibet*, Hong Kong: The Commercial Press (Hong Kong), 2003, pp. 67–75, pls. 65–72; Luo Wenhua (ed.): *Tibetan Buddhist Sculptures of the Palace Museum*, Beijing: Gugong Publishing House, 2009, <sup>2</sup>2012 reprinted 2020; The Palace Museum (ed.): *The Light of Buddha: the Palace Museum and the Zhiguan Museum of Art*, Beijing: Gugong Publishing House, 2019, pp. 166–186, plates 035–039.

<sup>2</sup> *The Inventory Report of the Palace Museum*, vol. 3–4, “The hall of Mental Cultivation (Yang Xin Dian).”

Cultivation (Yang Xin Dian). Lü 1253 was also recorded in the inventory of 1962, when the Palace Museum re-numbered all its collections. At that time, the Chinese character *gu* “old” was added in front of the accession numbers of those objects that had been kept in the Forbidden City before 1911 in order to classify them as belonging to the “old collection”.

2. According to the inventory from 1925/26, there are thirteen statues listed under Lü 1253. In addition to the Five Tathāgatas mentioned above, there are statues of the Eight Bodhisattvas, numbered *gu* 202003 1-8/8. The statues of the Five Tathāgatas were removed to an underground storeroom in 1965 after they had been in the Hall of Mental Cultivation for a period of time unknown to us. In contrast, the group of the statues of the Eight Bodhisattvas is worshipped on the south central altar table of the Tibetan Buddhist chapel on the second floor of the north part of the West Warm Pavilion of the Hall of Mental Cultivation until the present day. They are the central deities of worship in this chapel.

Although there is no detailed information about the inventory of this chapel recorded in the Qing Furnishing Archive of the Hall of Mental Cultivation, we are fortunate to find a very important reference in the Record of the Imperial Workshop, where it is said that the Qing Imperial Household Office decreed on the 12<sup>th</sup> day of the first month in the 12<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Emperor Qianlong (February 20<sup>th</sup> 1747; Emperor Qianlong ruled 1736–1796) that the Five Tathāgata statues and the Eight Bodhisattva statues should each be equipped with a purple wooden aureole and pedestal, and that they should be installed on the upper floor of the West Warm Pavilion of the Hall of Mental Cultivation.<sup>3</sup>

From this document we know that the Five Tathāgatas statues were sent to the Qing court as gifts from Tibet before 1747, when they were installed in the chapel of the Hall of Mental Cultivation as principal deities. Unfortunately, the pedestals and aureoles are missing today.

The Hall of Mental Cultivation, especially the West Warm Pavilion, is the most important and private place in the Qing Palace. Since the rule of Emperor Yongzheng (1723–1735), the south of the West Warm Pavilion of the Hall of Mental Cultivation (Yang Xin Dian) has been the emperor’s office and study. The Qing emperors met ministers there, dealt with state affairs and appreciated art, while the north of the West Warm Pavilion remained relatively secluded, with a secret Tibetan Buddhist chapel, which was rarely open to outsiders. In 1744, Emperor Qianlong installed a seven-story and eight-sided purple sandalwood Amitāyus Stūpa in the middle of an open space on the first floor, and transformed the second floor into a veranda-style Buddhist chapel. On the altar tables of the chapel that were placed along the walls, old and new Buddhist statues, ritual implements, various sacred relics and the Thangkas, painted by the painters of the imperial workshop, were displayed. Most of these collections are still surviving. There are hidden doors on the sides of the chapel that lead south, directly to the office and study of the Emperor, and north to his bedroom in the rear hall. Therefore, we believe that this chapel was once the place of the private spiritual world of Emperor Qianlong.<sup>4</sup>

Iconographically the Five Tathāgatas could be called crowned Buddhas: Each of the Five

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The Palace Museum, reprinted June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1929, p. 68.

<sup>3</sup> The First Historical Archives of China & Art Museum, the Chinese University of Hong Kong (ed.): *The Record of the Imperial Workshop*. Beijing: Renmin Publications 2005. Vol. 14, p. 545.

<sup>4</sup> Luo Wenhua, “Sacrifice to Ancestors and Worship to Buddha: The Buddhist Family Shrine in the Hall of Mental Cultivation of Forbidden City and the Qing Emperor’s Religion,” *Palace Museum Journal*, no. 1, 2022, pp. 89–95.

Tathāgatas wears a garment, has an *uṣṇīṣa*, and sits in *vajraparyāṅkāśana* on a cushion on a semi-circular pedestal. Moreover, each Tathāgata wears a bejeweled ornament, namely a five-pointed crown fastened by a ribbon with fluttering ends, a flower behind his ears, a heavy necklace with attached pendants and bracelets on his upper arms and wrists. Buddhist images of a similar style from the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century were unearthed in Kurkihar (Bihar, India).<sup>5</sup> In terms of artistic style the upper garments of the Five Tathāgatas are transparent and without folds; they cover the left shoulders only. The deep line on the waist indicates the lower garments. The crown, *ūrṇas*, necklaces and borders of the garments are inlaid with silver and copper. Moreover, the crown, necklace, bracelets, cushion and pedestal are inlaid with lapis lazuli, turquoise, coral and glass. Such elaborate ornaments are quite rare in Pala metal sculptures.

In addition, the face is painted with cold gold, and the hair is painted blue. The statues are sealed with brass covers closing the underside of the pedestal. These covers were most likely added when the images were worshiped in a Tibetan chapel. On each cover a Chinese inscription is written with cinnabar ink: “Middle one, Vairocana,” “Right one, Akṣobhya,” “Left one, Ratnasambhava,” “Right two, Amitābha,” and “Left two, Amoghasiddhi.” These inscriptions accurately list the names and position of the five statues within the Vajradhātu-Maṇḍala.

The arrangement and iconographic characteristics of the images are listed in the following tables<sup>6</sup>:

Table 1

position	right 1	right 2	center	left 1	left 2
Tathāgata	Amitābha	Akṣobhya	Vairocana	Ratnasambhava	Amoghasiddhi
Mudrā	<i>dhyāna-mudrā</i> (both hands)	<i>bhūmiśarpa-mudrā</i> (right hand)	<i>bodhyagrī-mudrā</i> (both hands)	<i>varada-mudrā</i> (right hand)	<i>abhaya-mudrā</i> (right hand)
vehicle (Vāhana)	a pair of peacocks on the front of the pedestal	a pair of elephants on the front of the pedestal	a pair of prancing lions on the front of the pedestal	a pair of horses on the front of the pedestal	a pair of Garuḍas on the front of the pedestal

The pedestals are the most complex parts of the statues. The front and back of the pedestals are openwork. The front of the pedestal is divided by eight pillars into seven sections with seven deities inside. At the back of the pedestal are foliate scrolling patterns, growing from a root stem at the center; on each side are four oval medallions filled with symbols and deities.

<sup>5</sup> Susan L. Huntington: *The “Pāla-Sena” Schools of Sculpture*. Studies in South Asian Culture Volume X. Leiden 1984, figs. 69–71; Ulrich von Schroeder: *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*. Hong Kong 1981, pp. 278–279, figs. 67C-D.

<sup>6</sup> Lokesh Chandra and Nirmala Sharma: *Niṣpanna-Yogāvalī: Sanskrit and Tibetan texts with English translation*. New Delhi 2015, pp. 152–163, 19. Maṇḍala of Vajradhātu-Vairocana; bSod nams rgya mtsho, Musashi Tachikawa et al. (eds.): *Tibetan Mandalas: the Ngor Collections*, Tokyo 1983, plate 22 with explanations.

The deities and symbols are listed below:

Table 2 Front of the pedestal of the image of Vairocana (Fig. I.1; I.2)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
figure	Sattvavajrī	Ratnavajrī	Lion	Caturbhuja-Mahākāla	Lion	Dharmavajrī	Karmavajrī

Table 3 The back of pedestal of Vairocana statue (Fig. I.3–I.6)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
figure	<i>maṇiratna</i>	<i>hastīratna</i>	<i>strīratna</i>	<i>gr̥hapatiratna</i>	<i>pariṇāyakaratna</i>	<i>aśvaratna</i>	<i>cakraratna</i>

Table 4 The front of the pedestal of the image of Akṣobhya (Fig. II.1; II.2)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
figure	Vajrasattva	Vajrasādhū	elephant	Vajrapāṇi	elephant	Vajrarāja	Vajrarāga

Table 5 The back of the pedestal of Akṣobhya statue (Fig. II.3–II. 6)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
deity	F.	F.	Maitreya	Amoghadarśin	Sarvāpāyajaha	Sarvaśokatamonirghātamatī	Gītā	Nṛtyā

F. = female deity bringing offerings

Table 6 The front of the pedestal of the image of Ratnasambhava (Fig. III.1; III.2)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
figure	Vajraratna	Vajrateja	horse	Gaganagarbha	horse	Vajraketu	Vajrahāsa

Table 7 The back of the pedestal of the image of Ratnasambhava (Fig. III.3–III.6)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
deity	Vaṃśā	F.	Gandhastī	Śūramgama	Gaganagañja	Jñānaketu	Murajā	Mṛdaṅgā

Table 8 The front of the pedestal of the image of Amitābha (Fig. IV.1; IV.2)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
figure	Vajradharma	Vajratīkṣṇa	peacock	Lokeśvara	peacock	Vajrahetu	Vajrabhāṣa

Table 9 The back of the pedestal of the image of Amitābha (Fig. IV.3–IV.6)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
figure	Dhūpā	Puṣpā	Amṛtaprabha	Candraprabha	Bhadrapāla	Jālinīprabha	F.	F.

Table 10 The front of the pedestal of the image of Amoghasiddhi (Fig. V.1; V.2)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
figure	Vajrakarma	Vajrarakṣa	Garuḍa	Vajraviśvakarya	Garuḍa	Vajrayakṣa	Vajrasandhi

Table 11 The back of the pedestal of the image of Amoghasiddhi (Fig. V.3–V.6)

list	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
deity	Rasā	Rūpā	Vajragarbha	Akṣayamati	Pratibhānakūṭa	Samantabhadra	Gandhā	Dīpā

Preliminary conclusions can be drawn from our identification of the deities on the pedestal:

Although some of the deities are unidentified, we believe that this group of Five Tathāgatas represents the Vajradhātu-Manḍala ultimately based on the Sarvatathāgata-tattvasaṃgraha.<sup>7</sup> Namely, the center of the Maṇḍala is formed by Vairocana and the four Vajrīs on the front of the pedestal (table 2: 1, 2, 6, 7); Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha, Amoghasiddhi and the 4 bodhisattvas on the front of the pedestals (table 4, 6, 8, 10: 1, 2, 6, 7) form the east, south, west and north Tathāgatas and the 16 Bodhisattvas (cf. note 7). At the back of the pedestal are the four Bhadrakalpika-Bodhisattvas (table 5, 7, 9, 11: 3–6) and four female deities bringing offerings (table 5, 7, 9, 11: 1, 2, 7, 8). Each of the central Bodhisattvas sitting at the front of the pedestal of the four Tathāgata images (table 4, 6, 8, 10: 4) represent the nature of the first Bodhisattva of the four Bodhisattvas surrounding the Tathāgata. Curiously, despite their being important members of the Vajradhātu-Manḍala, the four guardian deities are not represented in this group of images.

The transformation of eight female deities with their offerings (as they appear in the Vajradhātu-Manḍala) into sixteen deities seems to have happened under the influence from Ma rgyud of the Anuttarayogatantra.<sup>8</sup> In addition, Caturbhuja-Mahākala sitting in the center of the front of the pedestal of the Vairocana image and the Saptaratna of the Cakravartin at its back symbolize the protection and patronage of secular power. The Saptaratna is the attribute and status symbol of the Cakravartin, who is the worldly counterpart of a Buddha. A Cakravartin wields secular power (Pāli *āṇācakka* “wheel of command”) which corresponds to spiritual power exercised by a Buddha (Pāli *dharmacakka* “wheel of the Law”).<sup>9</sup>

The Vajradhātu-Manḍala with the Five Tathāgatas is unique in Pāla art, and only very rarely are similar examples are met with in Tibet. A 12<sup>th</sup> century Vajradhātu-Manḍala Thangka from Central Tibet painted on cotton and measuring 125 x 125 cm is preserved in a private collection today.<sup>10</sup> This is a very early Thangka showing the 53-deity Vajradhātu-

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Sarvatathāgatatattvasaṃgraha, the 37-deities Vajradhātu Maṇḍala consist of Five Tathāgatas, 4 Vajrīs, 16 Bodhisattvas, 8 female deities bringing offerings and 4 guardian deities, cf. Kanjin Horiuchi: *Sarva-Tathāgata-Saṃgrahaṃ Nāma Mahā-Yāna-Sūtram*. Wakayama 1983, vol. 1, §17-2~190; Musashi Tachikawa et al. (eds.): *bSod nams rgya mtsho*. 1983, pl. 22 with explanations; Ruan Li: *Studies on Mandalas in Dunhuang Caves*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Central Academy of Fine Arts, Beijing, 2012, pp. 73–74.

<sup>8</sup> For instance, they appear in the 37-deity Vajrasattva-Manḍala according to the Saṃputatantra, Niṣpanna-Yogāvalī, Maṇḍala 3, Lokesh Chandra and Nirmala Sharma, as note 6 above, pp. 46 foll.; in addition, Tibetan versions of the Cakrasaṃvara-Manḍala found in an Uyghur manuscript from Turfan and Chinese translations from Tangut mention that 16 offering female deities are born from the practitioner’s heart by way of his mind as an offering in the Cakrasaṃvara-Manḍala. They can also be arranged on the gates of the four directions in this Maṇḍala. Although these manuscripts from Turfan and in Tangut are later than the group of images discussed here, we believe that there must have been an earlier ritual of 16 females bringing offerings in traditions in India, cf. Shen Weirong, Li Channa “The Origin of ‘The Dance of Sixteen Heavenly Devils’ and the Related Chinese and Tibetan Sources on It,” in: Shen Weirong (ed.): *History through Textual Criticism: Tibetan Buddhism in Central Eurasia and China Proper*. Peking: China Tibetology Publishing House 2012, pp. 499–564.

<sup>9</sup> Sun Yinggang, “Wu Zetian’s Saptaratna: the Images, Symbols and their Political Implications of the Cakravartin.” *Studies in World Religions*. 2. 2015, pp. 43–53.

<sup>10</sup> Steven M. Kossak and Jane Casey Singer: *The Sacred Visions: Early Paintings from Central Tibet*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, p. 28, fig. 13; P. Pal, *Himalayas: An Aesthetic Adventure*. The Art

Maṇḍala. It is heavily influenced by Pāla style and was made at about same time as the images discussed here. In addition to the 37 deities of the Vajradhātu-Maṇḍala, 16 Bhadrakalpika-Bodhisattvas and guardian deities of the four gates are painted in the four corners of the outer corridor. In the lower-left corner of the painting, the Tibetan donors are shown and in the lower-right corner, the Saptaratna of the Cakravartin.

Moreover, Vajradhātu-Maṇḍala murals of the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> century in the sGo gsum lha khang and in the Kanjur lha khang of the Shalu Monastery in Central Tibet<sup>11</sup> are also early Maṇḍalas with varying members. This proves that the Vajradhātu-Maṇḍala has undergone quite a complex evolution during the late Pāla period.

## Reading of the Inscriptions and Commentary by O. v. Hinüber

### Introduction

This complete set of the five Tathāgatas or Buddhas, which are usually called Dhyāni-Buddhas following a Nepalese tradition communicated by B. Hodgson,<sup>12</sup> is of considerable interest not only because of the inscriptions, but above all, because it is a rare example that allows for the observation of the iconography of all the individual Buddhas belonging to this group as described in Abhayākara's Niṣpannayogāvali.<sup>13</sup>

The inscriptions are discussed following the sequence of the Buddhas as found in the Dharmasaṃgraha § III: *pañca buddhāḥ. tadyathā. vairocano 'kṣobhyo ratnasambhavo 'mitābho 'moghasiddhiś ceti*, which concurs with the Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha, the Niṣpannayogāvalī or the Mahāvīyutpatti.<sup>14</sup>

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Institute of Chicago in association with the University of California Press and Mapin Publishing, 2003, p. 176–177, fig. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Luo Wenhua & Ma Jiyue, *Wall Paintings of Shalu Murals*, Sichuan Publishing House, 2019, pp. 86–95, 132–139.

<sup>12</sup> The history of the term Dhyāni-Buddha is traced in appendix 1 below.

<sup>13</sup> *The Niṣpannayogāvalī by Abhayākara-gupta. A New Critical Edition of the Sanskrit Text (Revised edition)* by Yong-hyun Lee. Seoul 2004 (abbreviated NSP), cf. also *Sarva-tathāgata-tattva-saṃgraha nāma Mahāyāna-sūtra*. ed. by I. Yamada. Śatapiṭaka Series 262. Delhi 1981, p. 89 Chapter I Vajradhātumahāmaṇḍalavidhi, Karmamudrābandha. — On the iconography see the introduction by Luo Chenhua and G. Bhattacharya, “Buddha Śākyamuni and Pañca-Tathāgatas: Dilemma in Bihar - Bengal,” *South Asian Archaeology 1985* [1989] pp. 351–371, reprinted in: G. Bhattacharya: *Essays on Buddhist Hindu Jain Iconography & Epigraphy*. Studies in Bengal Art Series No. I. Dhaka 2000, pp. 29–41, particularly pp. 351 foll. = 29 foll., and the relevant paragraphs quoted below from M.-Th. de Malletmann: *Introduction à l'iconographie du tântrisme bouddhique*. Paris 1986. A different iconographic tradition is described by B. Bhattacharyya: *The Indian Buddhist Iconography mainly based on the Sādhanamālā and cognate Tāntric Texts of Rituals*. Calcutta 1958, pp. 42–81. In his chapter I “Dhyāni and mortal Buddhas,” Bhattacharyya regularly refers to the Advayavajrasaṃgraha, but never immediately to his principle source the Sādhanamālā, which creates certain problems as mentioned below. It seems that only the Niṣpannayogāvalī actually includes the *vāhanas* as well as the *mudrās* in the list of the five Tathāgatas.

<sup>14</sup> *The Dharma-saṃgraha. An ancient collection of Buddhist technical terms* prepared for publication by K. Kasawara, F. Max Müller and H. Wenzel. *Anecdota Oxoniensia*. Aryan Series Vol. I, Part V. Oxford 1885, p. 1 and p. 36 notes on § III. The list of Buddhas is not included in the Chinese Dharmasaṃgraha (Dharmasaṃgraha, p. 1 note 6) and F. Weller: *Der Chinesische Dharmasaṃgraha*. Leipzig 1923 (handwritten [!] edition) p. 12 = *Kleine Schriften*. Glasenapp-Stiftung Band 26. Wiesbaden 1987, p. 956. The same sequence is found in the Mahāvīyutpatti nos. 82–86 in a section called Nānātathāgatanāmāni. It comprises also the names of the Buddhas from Vipasyin to Śākyamuni, Dīpaṃkara, etc. The Sarvatathāgatātattvasaṃgraha lists the Buddhas and their *mudrās* in the following sequence in three verses: Vairocana (name not mentioned): *bhodhāgrī nāma mudreyaṃ ... Akṣobhyasya bhūmisparśā; Ratne tu varadā tathā; Amitāyohi samādhyagrā Amoghasyābhayapradā*, p. 89 verses 2 and 3. B. Bhattacharyya, as preceding note, on the other hand, follows a different (his own?)

The structure of the inscriptions which are engraved in the lower rim of the pedestal of five Buddha images is identical in all cases. They begin on the front side and continue on the oval backside with the formula: # *ye dharmā hetuprabhavā hetuṃ teṣān tathāgato hy avadat\* tesāñ ca yo nirodha evaṃvādī mahāśramaṇaḥ* ||.

As expected this wording follows an eastern Indian tradition which is indicated by the use of *hy avadat*.<sup>15</sup> The distribution of the text of the formula on the front and back sides varies slightly. This is not recorded here nor are the minor variations in wording such as *hetun / hetuṃ*.

Then follows a metrical text composed in *śloka*-verses by or for the donor, who was the Śrāmaṇera Yaśodeva. The wording of these verses varies in the individual inscriptions. This part of the text is engraved on the backside of the oval pedestal.

The verses consistently begin with the name of the respective Dhyāni-Buddha, and this allows for the checking of the iconographical details provided by the relevant handbooks used by ancient Indian artists. Then follows the name of the donor. This is always the novice Yaśodeva, who is also qualified as *pravrajita* “having gone forth.” At the same time, this clarifies that all five Buddhas were donated by one person only and presumably at the same time. Various simple or causative verbs meaning “to arrange for the production” are used to emphasize that Yaśodeva was the donor and not the artisan who actually made the images.<sup>16</sup> Finally, different pious wishes which accompany the donation are mentioned, thus determining the motives behind the creation of these five Tathāgatas.

The script used is the Rañjanā-(or Pāla-) script,<sup>17</sup> which dates the images very roughly to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (?). It is well possible that they were cast in Nepal, but the ultimate provenance is unknown (on the history of the images see introduction by Luo Wenhua above).

The individual Buddhas are defined by their *mudrās* and, above all, by their “*vāhanas*,” which, however, differ slightly in various textual sources, as is discussed below under the respective items.

### The inscribed five Dhyāni-Buddhas

**1. Vairocana.** Figures I.1–I.6; Mahāvvyutpatti 82; B. Bhattacharyya no. 3, p. 53 foll.; M.-Th. de Mallmann, p. 393f.

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arrangement as indicated below in spite of Sādhnamālā no. 290: *jino vairocano khyāto ratnasambhava eva ca / amithābho 'moghasiddhir akṣobyaś ca prakīrtitaḥ*, Sādhnamālā Vol. II p. 568 & p. CXXXVIII quoted by B. Bhattacharyya, p. 47. This sequence may be due to metrical constraints.

<sup>15</sup> The various wordings of the *ye dharmā* - formula are classified by O. v. Hinüber, “An inscribed Avalokiteśvara from the Hemis Monastery, Ladakh,” *ARIRIAB* XVIII. 2015, pp. 3–9; for the *hy avadat*-group see p. 6 § 2.3.1, cf. also I. Strauch, “Two Stamps with the Bodhigarbhāṃkārakṣa Dhāraṇī from Afghanistan and Some Further Remarks on the Classification of Objects with the *ye dharmā* Formula,” in: *Prajñādhara. Essays on Asian Art, History, Epigraphy and Culture in Honour of Gouriswar Bhattacharya*. Delhi 2009. Vol. I, pp. 37–56.

<sup>16</sup> Various forms of the past of √*kr* and *vi-√dhā* and perhaps of the causative of √*kṛ* used are: (1) *vyadhāt\**; (2) *akārayet\** (or *akārayat\** / *akīrayat\**?); (3) *acīkarat*; (4) *vyadhata*; (5) *akārayat*. This is quite different from the usually fairly rigid formulas where only *kṛta* is used.

<sup>17</sup> This script is described in great detail with numerous examples by Shankar Man Rajbansi, “The evolution of Devanagari script. Nepālī lipivikāś. akṣar tathā lipivarnana (in Nepālī).” *Kailash. Journal of Himalayan Studies* II. 1&2. 1974, pp. 23–120, particularly plates 51–62 “prācīn rañjanā lipi,” cf. also L. Sander: *Paläographisches zu den Sanskrithandschriften der Berliner Turfan-Sammlung*. Katalogisierung der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland Supplementband 8, Wiesbaden 1968, Tafel 27 & 28 “Pāla-Schrift.”



Mudrā: Bodhyagrī / Dharmacakrapravartana (*dhṛtavajrabodhyagrīmudro*, NSP 53,11); Vāhana: Lion (*siṃhopari*, NSP 53,8). According to B. Bhattacharyya the *vāhana* is “a pair of dragons or gryphons” (p. 54). Unfortunately, Bhattacharyya does not give the Sanskrit term; worse, he does not provide the source of this information.<sup>18</sup> It seems that neither the Sādhnamālā nor the Niṣpannayogāvali know of “dragons or griffins.” On the other hand, it is highly unlikely that B. Bhattacharyya, without having in mind any specific textual source, refers only to images, where indeed griffins are shown.<sup>19</sup>

Text of the inscription:

*vairocanasya pratimā[m] vītajāyātāmā-vyadhāt\**  
*śrāvaṇera yaśodevo bhavāpaduvasāntaye ||*

The novice Yaśodeva, who is free from mental darkness which (the mental darkness) is in this particular case a wife (i. e. Yaśodeva is unmarried) prepared the image of Vairocana in order to appease the distress caused by existence (*bhava-āpad-upaśānti*).

Comment:

There is no *anusvāra* dot above the character *mā* in *pratimā*. This concurs with similar omissions in other inscriptions. Otherwise the reading does not pose any problem. The fairly elaborate *virāma* (indicated by \*) is used also in other inscriptions.

The forms *śrāvaṇera* instead of *śrāmaṇera*<sup>20</sup> and *uva-sāntaye* instead of *upaśāntaye* show Middle Indic influence. A similar expression occurs in the metrical donative inscription of the monk Vibhucandra: *punarutpādahetūdbhavopāśāntaye*.<sup>21</sup>

The attribute of Yaśodeva, *vīta-tamas* (*vītaṃ tamo yasmāt saḥ*), is well chosen, because Vairocana is “shining, brilliant” and *vairocana* is also a name of the sun. This mental darkness is caused by taking a wife (*jāyā eva tamas*): *vīta-jāyā-tamas*. Avoiding marriage is also seen as avoiding existence (*bhava*). Similar parallelisms are found in other inscriptions as well.

**2. Akṣobhya.** Figures II.1–II.6; Mahāvvyutpatti 83; B. Bhattacharyya no. 2, p. 51; M.-Th. de Mallmann, p. 92f.

Mudrā: Bhūsparśa (*bhūsparśābhinayaṃ kurvan*, NSP 54,6); Vāhana: Elephant (*dantīndropari*, NSP 54,5).<sup>22</sup>

<sup>18.</sup> Cf. G. Bhattacharya, as note 13 above, note 8: “I wonder where Bhattacharyya 1972: 16 found *dragon* as the vehicle of Vairocana?” which refers to B. Bhattacharyya: *Niṣpannayogāvali of Mahāpañḍita Abhayākara-gupta*. GOS 109. Baroda 1972. This edition is superseded by Y. Lee (2004) mentioned in note 13 above.

<sup>19.</sup> There are two examples, both mentioned by P. Pal: Bronzes of Kashmir. Graz 1975, p. 90. They are discussed in Appendix 2.

<sup>20.</sup> On *v ... n > m ... n* see O. v. Hinüber, “Vaiśramaṇavarman, King of Dards.” *ARIRIAB* XXIV. 2021, p. 4 note 5 and “Monks and Ascetics as Householdholders. New Evidence” in this issue of *ARIRIAB*, p. 4 note 9.

<sup>21.</sup> *Die Palola Śāhis. Ihre Steininschriften, Inschriften auf Bronzen, Handschriftenkolophone und Schutzzauber*. Antiquities of Northern Pakistan 5. Mainz 2004, p. 186, where the name of the monk is read erroneously as Citracandra instead of Vibhucandra: *pratimā kāritā śāstur / vibhucandrasya bhikṣuṇā // satvānām punar utpāda- / hetūdbhavopāśāntaye*. This also avoids the wrong Sandhi °-ur-ci-°. The reading given in J. Siudmak: *Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir* (see below), p. 272 note 17 Śaṣtrakṣetracandra following A. Heller is wrong.

<sup>22.</sup> Sometimes, Akṣobhya images are not recognized as such, see Appendix 2. — On Akṣobhya cf. J. Nattier, “The Realm of Akṣobhya: A Missing Piece in the History of Pure Land Buddhism.” *JIAS* 23. 2000, pp. 71–102 with rich references to further reading in note 4, p. 73. Iconography is outside the scope of this article. The same is true for I. Strauch, “More Missing Pieces of Early Pure Land Buddhism: New Evidence for Akṣobhya and Abhirati in an Early Mahāyāna Sūtra from Gandhāra.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 41. 2010, pp. 23–66.

Text of the inscription:

*akṣobhyasya mune(r) cimva(m) nirvilamvam akīrayet\**  
*yaśodevaḥ pravṛjitaḥ sakl(e)śabhṛtaye kṣaṇā(t\*)*

Yaśodeva, who has left home, had the image of Akṣobhya made without delay to bring forth freedom from defilement immediately.

Comment:

There are several problems of the interpretation concerning the inscription which are partly due to suspected or obvious errors committed by the engraver. Instead of *muner vimva(m)*, the engraver wrote *ci-°*, because no *-r-* (*mune vi-*) is visible: This can be easily verified by comparing *rma* in *dharma* or better still *rvi* in *nirvilamvam*, where a small vertical stroke indicates *-r-*. Therefore, the engraver committed two mistakes confusing the roundish *vi* with the triangular *ci* and omitting the stroke indicating *-r-*. It is unlikely that he had *citra* in mind, which would have required the *sandhi*-form *muneś citra(m)* and does not really fit semantically.

It seems that *akīrayet\** is written instead of *akārayet\** again with an elaborate *virāma*. However, the root  $\sqrt{kṛ}$  does not fit semantically,<sup>23</sup> unless this is a so far unattested technical term for creating a bronze image, cf. *utkīrṇa* “engraved, chiselled” used in copper plates (?). The optative form is used in the sense of the past, which is not unusual.<sup>24</sup> The writing *pravṛjita* for *pravrajita* is equally not without prior examples.<sup>25</sup> The word *saklaśabhṛtaye* is the most difficult part of the inscription. It obviously contains the wish connected with the donation of the image, which is always expressed in the dative. Words such as *klaśa* or *saklaśa* do not exist. Therefore, at first an emendation to *sakl(e)śa* does not seem to be a bad choice. This result, however, cannot be correct, if the second part of the compound is considered. The reading *°-bhṛtaye* < *bhṛti* is fairly certain,<sup>26</sup> but, at a first glance, *sakleśa-bhṛtaye* does not make any sense (on the presumed *sakleśa* “defilement,” cf. Schlingloff: *Yogalehrbuch*<sup>27</sup> or on *saṃkileśa* BHSD), because “for the sake of bringing defilement” does not fit at all. Therefore, it seems that the engraver mistook an initial *a-* for *sa-*, which is only remotely similar in this script. A confusion between *a-* and *su-* rather than *sa-*, on the other hand, occurs occasionally. If emended to *akleśabhṛtaye* “for the sake of bringing freedom from defilement,” the text makes sense in spite of the somewhat unusual compound. The missing *sandhi* between *pravṛjitaḥ akleśa-°* (for *pravṛjito 'kleśa-°*) does not pose any problem at the break between two quarters of the *śloka*. Perhaps the engraver did not notice the break and, consequently, “corrected” the original *a-°* into *sa-°* thus complying with the

<sup>23</sup> On *ut-√kṛ* see Ph. Granoff, “The Art of the Philosopher: Painting and Sculpture as Metaphor,” in: *Samskṛta-sādhutā. Goodness of Sanskrit. Studies in Honour of Professor Ashok Aklujkar*, Delhi 2012 [rev.: S. Bhate, *Sambhāṣā* 30. 2013, pp. 80–82; E. Kahrs, *BSOAS* 77. 2014, pp. 236–238], pp. 258–272 and D. C. Sircar: *Indian Epigraphical Glossary*. Delhi 1966 s.v. *utkīrṇa*.

<sup>24</sup> O. v. Hinüber, “Notes on the *e*-Preterite in Middle Indo Aryan.” *MSS* 36. 1977, 39–48 = *Kleine Schriften* II. 2009, 633–642.

<sup>25</sup> O. v. Hinüber, “A second Copper-Plate Grant of King Subandhu.” *ARIRIAB* 21. 2018, pp. 7–15, particularly p. 8 note 6.

<sup>26</sup> A reading *°-hṛtaye* is palaeographically ruled out.

<sup>27</sup> D. Schlingloff: *Ein buddhistisches Yogalehrbuch*. Unveränderter Nachdruck der Ausgabe von 1964 unter Beigabe aller seither bekannt gewordenen Fragmente herausgegeben von J.-U. Hartmann & H.-J. Röllicke, *Buddhistische Studien* 5, Düsseldorf 2006 [review article: G. Fussman, *JAs* 304. 2016. 249–263], pp. 158 (folio 156r3).

rules of *sandhi*, but destroying the meaning. The last word at the end of the inscription is written *kṣaṇā* instead of the correct *kṣaṇāt\**.

Here, Yaśodeva seems to have been in a hurry and was perhaps even pressed for an immediate fulfilment of his wishes: *nirvilamvam* “immediately” very nicely corresponds to *kṣaṇā(t\*)* “in a moment.” It almost seems as if the engraver was infected by this hurry, as a certain rushed carelessness might be seen as evident in his mistakes. An alternative explanation is that the inscription on the image of Akṣobhya was the last to be engraved and the fair number of mistakes are a sign that the engraver was a bit tired and lost his concentration. This phenomenon is often observed in manuscripts, when suddenly more errors are found in certain passages. However that may be, the overall interpretation of the text can be considered as correct.

**3. Ratnasambhava.** Figures III.1–III.6; Mahāvvyutpatti 84; B. Bhattacharyya no. 5, p. 73 foll.; M.-Th. de Mallmann, p. 321f.

Mudrā: Varada (*varadābhīṇayaṃ kurvāṇo*, NSP 54,16); Vāhana: Horse (*aśvapṛṣṭe*, NSP 54,15), B. Bhattacharyya: Lion.

Text of the inscription:

*ratnasambhavanāmānaṃ sugatavodhipr(ā)ptaye ||  
acīkarad dhīnajanmā yaśodevaḥ sagaurava(h) ||*

Yaśodeva, who is of humble origin (birth), [but] full of respect, had the one whose name is Ratnasambhava made in order to reach the enlightenment as a Sugata.

Comment:

Only the reading *pta* in *praptaye* is doubtful because of the small upward-bent stroke above the subscript *ta*, which seems to be meaningless. The expected form is *prāptaye*, but the long °-ā- is missing. There are a couple of corresponding formulas in which various derivations of the root √*āp* are used that can be compared such as *anuttarajñānavāptaye* (Aṣṭasāhasrikā Prajñānapāramitā, no. I 675,13, folio 380a13) with the variant *anuttarajñānavāpnuyā* (Bhaiṣajyagurusūtra, no. IV 1864.1= Ajitasenavyākaraṇa, no. VI 2416.1) and *anuttarajñānavāpnuyāyā* (Saddharmapuṇḍarīkasūtra, no. VII 3051.3).<sup>28</sup> The overall meaning, however, is not affected by the problems surrounding the character interpreted as *pta*.

In spite of the double consonant *pra* (*muta cum liquida*) the preceding vowel is metrically short.

**4. Amitābha.** Figures IV.1–IV.6; Mahāvvyutpatti 85; B. Bhattacharyya no. 1, p. 49 foll.; M.-Th. de Mallmann, p. 94f.<sup>29</sup>

Mudrā: Samādhi (*kṛtasamādhimudro*, NSP 55,5); Vāhana: Peacock (*mayūropari*, NSP 55,4)

Text of the inscription:

*munīndrasyāmitābhasya viṃvvaṃ samvোধivāñchayā ||*

<sup>28</sup> The respective colophons are edited by O. v. Hinüber, “Die Kolophone der Gilgit-Handschriften.” *StII* 5/6. 1980, pp. 49–82 = *Kleine Schriften* II. 2009, pp. 688–721, cf. also *Die Palola Śāhis*, as note 21 above, colophons nos. 6, 38B, 39B, 40B.

<sup>29</sup> K. Tanabe, “The Origin of Amida Buddha.” *ARIRIAB* XXIII. 2020, pp. 209–227 is not concerned with iconography, but contains useful references for the study of Amitābha.

*yaśodevaḥ śrāmaṇero vyadhata śuddhayānataḥ || १७ ||*

Yaśodeva made the image of the king of the sages, Amitābha, because of his wish to reach enlightenment on account of his pure way of life.

Comment:

It is also possible to read *śraddha*-° instead of *śuddha*-° which would mean “his living as a believer.” The script is ambiguous when it comes to the subscript -u/-r-, cf. *mahāśramaṇa* written in such a way that the word could also be interpreted graphically as *mahāśumaṇa*; for an example for *śu* cf. *viśuddhaye*, 5. Amoghasiddhi. Furthermore, as *śraddhā* is mentioned in the verse of the image of Amoghasiddhi, *śuddha* seems to be preferable here in order to avoid repetition.

The expression *munīndra* suggests the prominent position of Amitābha among the five Buddhas, which concurs with the remarks by B. Bhattacharyya (p. 49) who considers this Buddha as the first and foremost of the Dhyāni-Buddhas.

**5. Amoghasiddhi.** Figures V.1–V.6; Mahāvvyutpatti 86; B. Bhattacharyya no. 4, p. 55 foll.; M.-Th. de Mallmann, p. 99f.

Mudrā: Abhaya (*dakṣiṇapāṇinā viśvavajraṃ madhyāṅgulyā bibhrad abhayadānābhinayī vāmam uttānam utsaṅge sthāpayan*, NSP 55,16); Vāhana: Garuḍa (*garuḍopari*, NSP 55,15)

Text of the inscription:

*amoghasiddhi[m] samv[u]ddha[m] śraddhāvandanakandhara[m]  
akārayad yaśodevaḥ sarvakarmaviśuddhaye*

Yaśodeva had the Sambuddha Amoghasiddhi who is (Yaśodeva's) object of faith and veneration made for the sake of being purified from all Karma.

Comment:

Instead of reading of *śraddhāvandanakandhara* an interpretation as *śuddhā*-° cannot be ruled out. In this case the long -ā in *śuddhā* would not make sense. Likewise, a segmentation *śraddhā-vandana-kandhara* does not yield any meaningful word: “faith - veneration - neck.” Therefore *śraddhā-vandanakan-dhara* “possessing, holding faith and veneration” is to be preferred. Structurally, this epitheton should refer to the donor Yaśodeva, who is qualified in one way or another in all his other donations. The very prominent *visarga*, however, is not missing elsewhere in contrast to the *anusvāra* dot. Therefore, the compound seems to be connected with Amoghasiddhi grammatically and qualifies Yaśodeva only indirectly as one of those who venerate Amoghasiddhi.

The donor Yaśodeva bears a common name that does not allow for any identification with other known persons. He describes himself as an unmarried novice (*śrāmaṇera*, *vīta-jāyā-tamas*, 1. Vairocana) and as someone who has gone forth (*pravrajita*, 2. Akṣobhya). It is not impossible that he is thereby distancing himself from *grhapatīśramaṇas*.<sup>30</sup> He is of low birth, but full of veneration (*hīnajanman*, *sagaurava*, 3. Ratnasambhava). His lifestyle is pure (*śuddhayāna*, 4. Amitābha) and he is pious (*śraddhāvandanakandhara*, 5. Amoghasiddhi). Yaśodeva connects one specific wish with each of his five donations. These wishes could be

<sup>30</sup> Cf. “Monks and Ascetics as Householders. New Evidence” in this issue of *ARIRIAB*, pp. 3–7.

classified in the following way:

Akṣobhya: *akleśabhṛti*  
Amoghasiddhi: *sarvakarmaviśuddhi*  
Vairocana: *bhavāpaduvasānti*  
Amitābha: *saṃvoddhivāñchā*  
Ratnasambhava: *sugatavodhiprāpti*

Freedom from *kleśas* leads to purity from all *karma* and this, in turn, to the cessation of becoming (*bhava*). Ultimately, following the wish for illumination, there is, as the final goal, the illumination as a Buddha. If this sequence is really intended, it does not concur with the arrangement of the Tathāgatas in the Niṣpannayogāvali or elsewhere.

## Appendix 1

### A Short Note on the Term Dhyāni-Buddha.

Under his entry *dhyāni-buddha* F. Edgerton (1885–1963) states that he could not trace this term in any Buddhist text and refers to E. Burnouf (1801–1852) as the first who used it in the west. The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism concurs, but includes B. Hodgson as a source. Nevertheless, it is perhaps worthwhile to trace the history of the term in a bit more detail.<sup>31</sup>

Brian H. Hodgson (1800–1894) was indeed the first European scholar to mention the term *dhyāni*-Buddha in his article “Notices of the Languages, Literature and Religion of the Bauddha of Nepāl and Bhot” in *Asiatic Researches* XVI. 1828, pp. 409–449, particularly pp. 440 foll., that was later reprinted in B. Hodgson: *Essays on the Languages, Literature and Religion of Nepāl and Tibet*. London 1874 (reprinted Amsterdam 1972). It seems that Hodgson picked up the term from an oral tradition early on in his stay as Resident in Kathmandu 1825–1843.<sup>32</sup>

It was, however E. Burnouf, who finally introduced the term Dhyāni-Buddha to Western Buddhological research in two publications *Introduction à l'histoire du buddhisme indien* (Paris 1876<sup>33</sup> p. 104 = p. 117 of the first edition) and *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* (Paris 1852, p. 400). In *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* Burnouf does not immediately refer to Hodgson, but to the pioneer in Mongol and Tibetan studies Isaak Jacob Schmidt (1779–1849), who mentioned the Dhyāni-Buddhas in his article “Ueber einige Grundlehren des Buddhaismus” in *Mémoires de l'Académie impériale des sciences de St. Petersbourg*. Série VI. Sciences politiques, histoire et philologie. Tome I 1832, pp. 90–120, particularly pp. 93 and 104–107 “... fünf Dhjāni-Buddhas, die bei den Mittelasiatischen Buddhaisten durchaus in derselben hohen Achtung stehen wie bei den Nipalischen. Die Letzteren scheinen aber die wahre Bedeutung dieser Buddhas gar nicht zu verstehen ...” This interesting link between Hodgson and Burnouf in his *Le Lotus de la Bonne Loi* seems to have been almost forgotten.

The term used by the Buddhists themselves is *pañcatathāgata* or *pañcājina*.

Further early references from European Buddhological literature are collected in the notes

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<sup>31</sup>. F. Edgerton: *Buddhist Hybrid Grammar and Dictionary*. Volume II Dictionary. New Haven 1953 and Robert E. Buswell and D. S. Lopez: *The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism*. Princeton & Oxford 2014.

<sup>32</sup>. K. L. Pradhan: *Brian Hodgson at the Kathmandu Residency 1825–1843*. Delhi 2001.

<sup>33</sup>. The English version of the book was reviewed by J. Silk, “A missed opportunity.” *History of Religions* 51. 2011, pp. 261–272.

on Dharmasaṃgraha (Anecdota Oxoniensia) § III p. 36, cf. note 14 above; cf. also G. Bhattacharya, “Buddha Śākyamuni and Pañca-Tathāgatas,” as note 13 above, p. 370 note 3 = p. 29 note 3.

## Appendix 2

### The Five Tathāgatas represented in Stone Sculptures

#### Some Examples

In stone sculpture complete sets of the five Tathāgatas do not seem to be that rare; to give only a few random examples from eastern India: Four Tathāgatas (Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitābha) survive of what was once a complete set at Udayagiri in Orissa.<sup>34</sup> All Buddhas are supported by a pair of Nāgas shown on the pedestal. No *vāhana* is depicted. Moreover, these Buddhas appear on the nimbus of stone reliefs found at various sites and dated from Pāla and Sena times.<sup>35</sup> A similar broken nimbus was also unearthed at Udayagiri.<sup>36</sup> In all cases, the five Tathāgatas may be identified by their respective *mudrās* and by their being represented as a group. The *vāhanas*, on the other hand, appear vary rarely and are often overlooked as in the following examples.

**I. Vairocana** images which are not identified as such are:

1. A Vairocana from Jāipur is published by Donaldson: *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa*, as in note 33, Vol. II, Figure 227 (description Vol. I, p. 52 erroneously “possibly represents Vajradharma”). The image is defined by the Bodhyagrī mudrā and by the lion depicted in the middle of the pedestal between the two lions of the *śiṃhāsana*. No attention is paid to the lion by Donaldson.
2. The Buddha published by P. Pal: *Bronzes of Kashmir*. Graz 1975, p. 90 (Los Angeles County Museum of Art [LACMA]; formerly Heeramanek Collection) is classified as Gautama Buddha. However, the Dharmacakrapravartanamudrā and a pair of “griffins” flanking the sitting atlas figure supporting the seat of the Buddha indicate that this is an image of Vairocana.
3. A second image showing the same iconographic features was published earlier by J.-Ph. Vogel, “Inscribed brass statuette from Fatehpur (Kangra).” *Archaeological Survey of India. Annual Report 1904–5*, pp. 107–109.

Both images (nos. 2 & 3) are republished by J. Siudmak: *The Hindu-Buddhist Sculpture of Ancient Kashmir and Its Influences*. Handbuch der Orientalistik. II. Abteilung: Indien. Band 28. Leiden 2013 [rev.: Ch. Luczanitz, *BSOAS* 77. 2014, pp. 600 foll.; F. Dutillieux, *Arts Asiatiques* 72. 2017, pp. 171–174], fig. 137 (LACMA) and 161 (Fatehpur). The images are classified as “seated Buddha” by Siudmak without paying further attention to the “griffins”. According to Siudmak (p. 351) the bronze from Fatehpur was preserved in the collections of the Lahore Museum, but is missing at present.

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<sup>34</sup>. Th. E. Donaldson: *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa*. Delhi 2001 Vol. II (Plates), plates 127–130, description Vol. I, pp. 95, 119.

<sup>35</sup>. Examples are found in S. Huntington: *The “Pāla-Sena” Schools*, as note 5 above, figures 232–238, 210, 232.

<sup>36</sup>. P. K. Trivedi, “Further Excavations at Udayagiri-2, Orissa (2001–03).” *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India* No. 104. Delhi 2012, plate CVIII.

## II. Akṣobhya images which are not identified as such are:

1. The main image in the central shrine of the Mahābodhi temple at Bodh Gayā is an Akṣobhya defined by the *bhūsparśamudrā* and the pair of elephants on the pedestal. The image is published in S. Huntington: *The “Pala-Sena” Schools* (as note 5) figure 106. Although it is noted “that the pedestal ... is divided vertically by pillars, which separate the depictions of a figure and animals (i. e. elephants, O.v.H)” (p. 100), the image is classified simply as “Buddha.”
2. A second Akṣobhya from Kurkihar is also defined as “Buddha” by Huntington plate 117, description pp. 100, 103 foll. Again the “animals” are noticed; it is overlooked that they are elephants which together with the *bhūsparśamudrā* define the image as Akṣobhya.
3. An Akṣobhya from the Indian Museum, Calcutta, is classified as Vajrāsana by B. Bhattacharyya in his *Sādhnamālā* edition Vol. II, p. CXLVIII. The pair of elephants in the pedestal is mentioned in the description without recognizing their significance. The *mudrā* is *bhūsparśa*.
4. An image in the Cleveland Museum of Art is erroneously defined as Buddha Śākyamuni by P. Pal: *Masterpieces of Indian Sculpture from the Former Collections of Nasli M. Heeramanek*. 1979, plate 113; the elephant and the *bhūsparśamudrā* are mentioned in the description; cf. also plate 126.
5. A damaged image found at Ratnagiri (Orissa) with only the lower part of the torso and the pedestal being preserved is hesitantly but correctly classified as “Akṣobhya (?)” by Debala Mitra: *Ratnagiri (1958–61)*. Volume I. Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India no. 80. Delhi 1981, plate LXXXIXB (description p. 143). The elephants (“The animals are badly defaced and broken. Their body is heavy like that of an elephant”) are still recognizable and define, together with the *bhūsparśamudrā*, the fragments of the image as Akṣobhya. The uncertainty indicated by the question mark is unnecessary. This image once adorned Stūpa no. 227 (p. 93 foll.) in niches facing the four cardinal directions as part of a set of four Tathāgatas, which has been preserved (Vairocana is missing, p. 95 foll.).
6. Akṣobhya on plate 12 in C. Bautze-Picron: *The Art of Eastern India in the Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst, Berlin. Stone and Terracotta Sculptures*. Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie Band 12. Berlin 1998 [rev.: O. v. Hinüber, *WZKS* 46. 2002, 287–289]. Although the slightly rubbed off elephant in the pedestal is duly noted in the description of the image (p. 23), the sitting Buddha displaying *bhūsparśamudrā* is not classified as Akṣobhya.
7. The pedestal image no. 76 (description p. 44) in the same publication showing elephants on either side between the central atlas figure and the lions of the *siṃhāsana* may have once supported an image of Akṣobhya.

Lastly, a “brassy copper” image should be mentioned here:

8. An image of Akṣobhya of unknown provenance from the John D. Rockefeller Collection is erroneously classified as Śākyamuni by S. L. and J. C. Huntington: *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India (8th–12th centuries) and Its International Legacy*. Seattle & London 1990, coloured image 135 and description p. 372 foll. The misclassification obviously overlooks the elephants depicted on the pedestal. The *mudrā* is *bhūsparśa*.

### III. Ratnasambhava

An image of Ratnasambhava from Bhāgalapur is correctly defined in Huntington: *The Pāla-Sena Schools* (as note 5 above): Figure 156 is described as “There can be no question that this image represents Ratnasambhava since his horse *vāhana* and characteristic *varadamudrā* are clearly depicted” (p. 130).

### Addendum

#### II. Akṣobhya

3. The image is also reproduced in B. Bhattacharyya: *Indian Buddhist Iconography*. Calcutta 1959, figure 46 (p. 68), description p. 77 foll.
9. & 10. Two unrecognized Akṣobhya images are preserved in the Varendra Research Museum, Rajshahi, Bangladesh: M. Rahman: *Sculpture in the Varendra Research Museum. A Descriptive Catalogue*. Rajshahi 1998, no. 1 plate 1 (from Betka, Munshiganj District) and no. 8, plate 6 (from Kirtoil, Māndā, Naogaon District). The elephants in the pedestal are mentioned in the descriptions. The *mudrā* of both Buddhas is *bhūsparśa*. Only the Buddha from Kirtoil is included in and identified as Akṣobhya by E. Haque & A. Gail: *Sculptures in Bangladesh. An Inventory of Select Hindu, Buddhist and Jain Stone and Bronze Images in Museums and Collections of Bangladesh* (up to the 13th Century). Studies in Bengal Art Series no. 8, Dhaka 2008, no. \*70, plate 472.
11. A headless image of the Buddha Akṣobhya from Bharson, Māndā, Naogaon District is also preserved in the Varendra Research Museum and published in Haque & Gail: *Sculptures* (as above), no. \*69, plate 485 and earlier in Rahman: *Sculpture* (as above), no. 6, plate 4. Although the elephant in the pedestal is mentioned by M. Rahman in his description, the Buddha is wrongly classified as Ādi-Buddha.
12. An image from Khetlal, Joypurhat District, now in the Mahāsthān Museum is erroneously identified as Śākyamuni in Haque & Gail: *Sculptures* (as above), no. \*363, plate 479. The presence of an elephant in the middle of the pedestal and the *bhūsparśamudrā* support the identification as Akṣobhya.
13. G. Bhattacharya, “The Newly Discovered Buddhist Temple at Nālandā,” in: *South Asian Archaeology. Papers from the Seventh International Conference of the Association of South Asian Archaeologists in Western Europe*. Naples 1985. Volume II, pp. 719–740, particularly, p. 728 foll. identifies a Buddha image from Ujāni, Faridpur District, Bangladesh tentatively as Akṣobhya. The Buddha holds his right hand in *bhūsparśamudrā*. The front of the pedestal is decorated with the *saptaratna* of the *cakravartin* with a *vajra* in the middle. There are no animals except leogryphs that are shown on both sides of the throne.

### III. Ratnasambhava

2. An image from Vikrampur, Munshiganj District correctly defined as the Buddha Ratnasambhava by his *varadamudrā* is shown in Rahman: *Sculpture* (see above), no. 3, plate 2. The *saptaratna* of the *cakravartin* in the pedestal are described, but obviously not recognized as such.
3. A damaged, heavily restored image of a sitting Buddha is still worshipped at a temple in Satiemandangi, District Dinajpur as “Satiaman Ṭhākur” according to Haque & Gail:



*Sculptures* (see above), no. \*546, plate 484 (restored image). An image of this Buddha before restoration can be seen in the article “Iconography” (Figure 25) by G. Bhattacharya in the Banglapedia (accessible in the internet: <https://en.banglapedia.org/index.php/Iconography>). The missing right hand is restored as showing the *bhūsparśa-mudrā*. However, in the pedestal three lions are shown, not the expected elephant in the middle if the image was an Akṣobhya, who holds his right hand in *bhūsparśa*. Also of interest are the leogryphs shown at both sides of the throne.

4. A Buddha probably from Kurkihar in the Asian Art Museum, San Francisco (The Avery Brundage Collection B60S598) dated 850–950, also shows *bhūsparśamudrā* and sits on a throne supported by lions. The lion to the left of the Buddha is exchanged with the worshipper mentioned in the inscription: *deyadharmmo yaḥ svaprajñāprabhasya*. Both sides of the throne are decorated by leogryphs.

Because of the conflicting symbols (*mudrā*: Akṣobhya; *vāhana*: Vairocana) the identification of nos. 3 and 4 remains uncertain.

5. The same is true for a standing Buddha from Dinajpur District (the exact provenance is unknown) preserved in the Varendra Research Museum and published in V. Lefèvre & M.-F. Boussac: *Art of the Ganges Delta. Masterpieces from Bangladeshi Museums*. Paris 2008, no. 67 and in Rahman: *Sculpture* (as above), no. 9, plate 7. Both hands are broken off; the remains of the right hand would allow the restoration of the *varadamudrā* of Ratnasambhava. In contrast, the elephant in the middle of the pedestal belongs to Akṣobhya. Above the Buddha the five “Dhyāni”-Buddhas are shown and on both sides leogryphs.

Finally, leogryphs are also shown on both sides of a sitting Khadiravaṇī Tārā in Lefèvre & Boussac: *Art of the Ganges* (see above), no. 73. The pedestal is decorated by two lions flanking an elephant.

PLATE 6

Fig. I.1 Vairocana.



Fig. I.2 Vairocana front view of the pedestal.





Fig. I.3 Vairocana rear view.

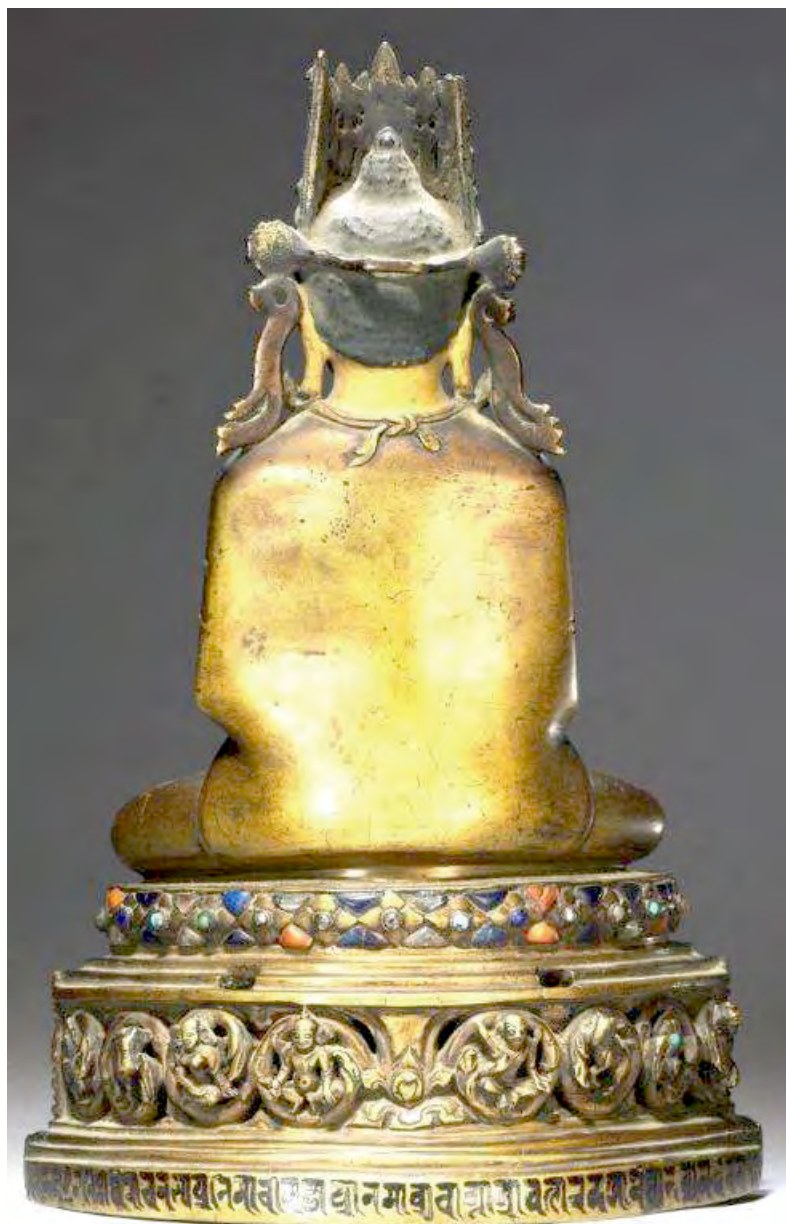


Fig. I.4 Vairocana rear view of the pedestal (left side).





PLATE 8

Fig. I.5 Vairocana rear view of pedestal (middle).



Fig. I.6 Vairocana rear view of the pedestal (right side).





Fig. II.1 Akṣobhya.

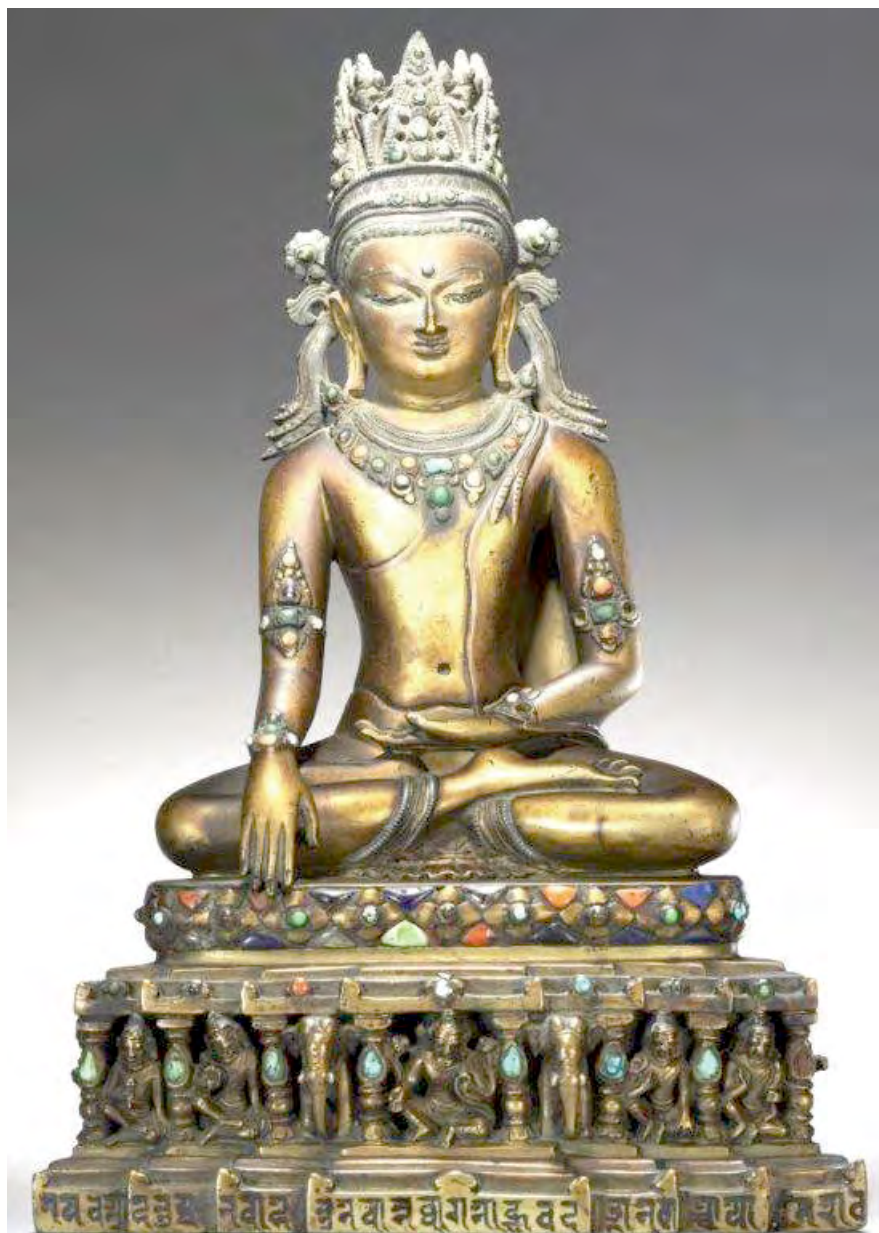


Fig. II. 2 Akṣobhya front view of the pedestal.





PLATE 10

Fig. II.3 Akṣobhya rear view.



Fig. II.4 Akṣobhya rear view of the pedestal (left side).





Fig. II.5 Akṣobhya rear view of pedestal (middle).



Fig. II.6 Akṣobhya rear view of the pedestal (right side).





PLATE 12

Fig. III.1 Ratnasambhava.



Fig. III.2 Ratnasambhava front view of the pedestal.

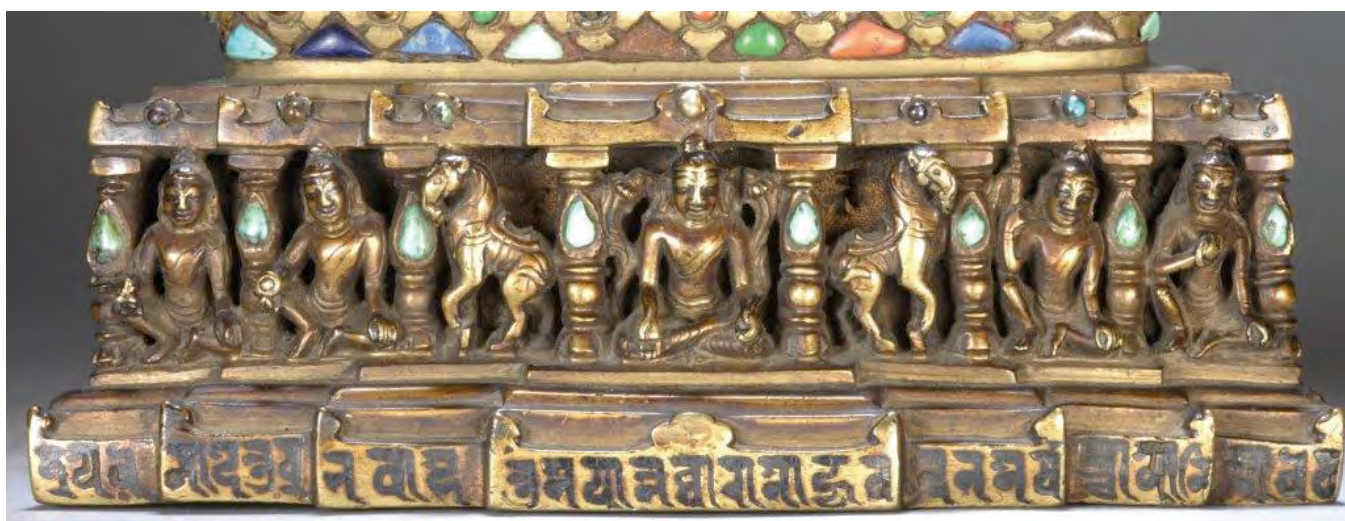




Fig. III.3 Ratnasambhava rear view.

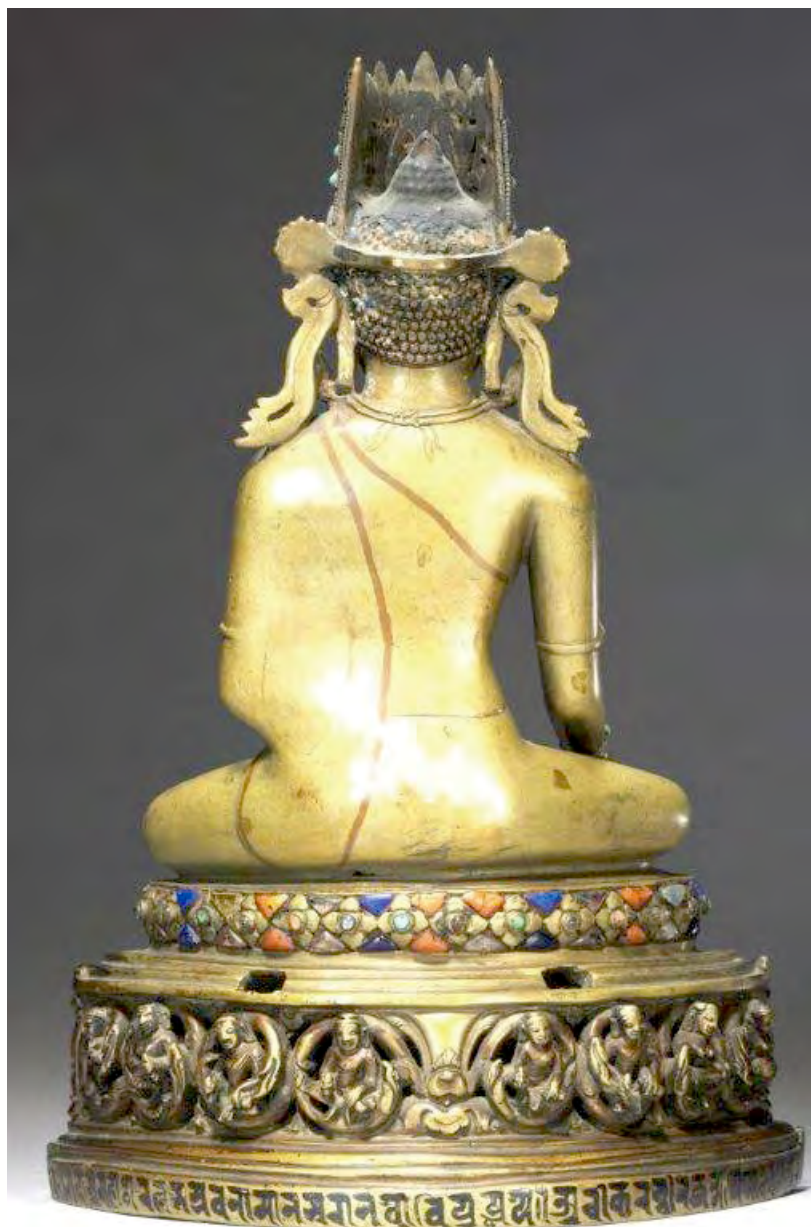


Fig. III.4 Ratnasambhava rear view of the pedestal (left side).





PLATE 14

Fig. III.5 Ratnasambhava rear view of pedestal (middle).



Fig. III.6 Ratnasambhava rear view of the pedestal (right side).





Fig. IV.1 Amitābha.



Fig. IV.2 Amitābha front view of the pedestal.

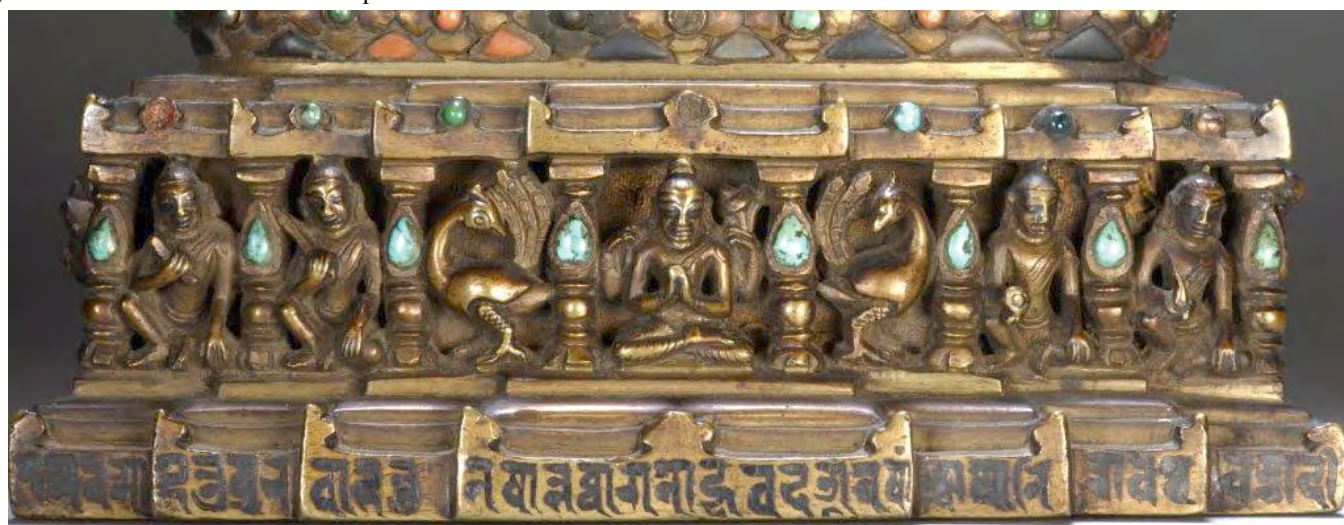




PLATE 16

Fig. IV.3 Amitābha rear view.



Fig. IV.4 Amitābha rear view of the pedestal (left side).





Fig. IV.5 Amitābha rear view of pedestal (middle).



Fig. IV.6 Amitābha rear view of the pedestal (right side).





PLATE 18

Fig. V.1 Amoghasiddhi.



Fig. V.2 Amoghasiddhi front view of the pedestal.





Fig. V.3 Amoghasiddhi rear view.

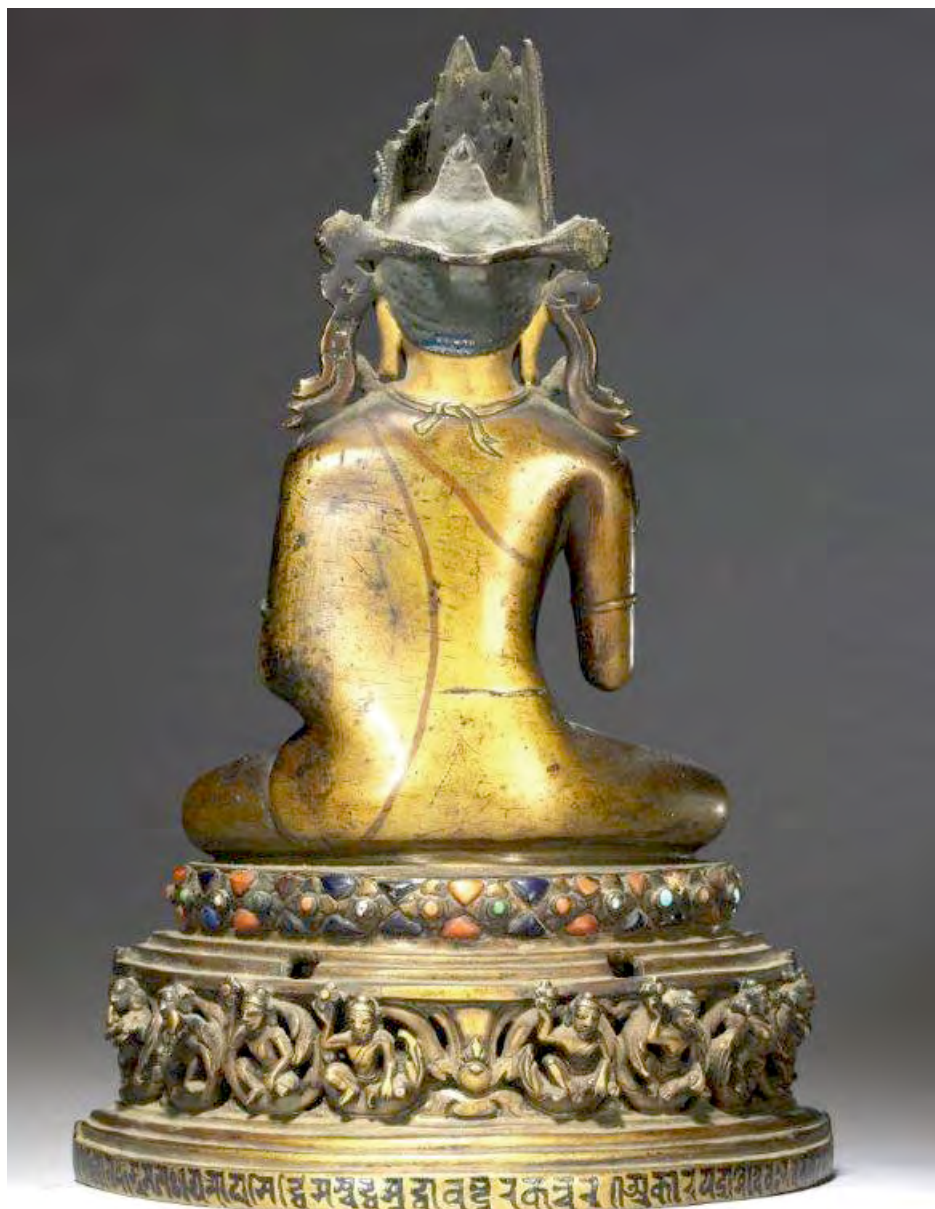


Fig. V.4 Amoghasiddhi rear view of the pedestal (left side).





PLATE 20

Fig. V.5 Amoghasiddhi rear view of pedestal (middle).



Fig. V.6 Amoghasiddhi rear view of the pedestal (right side).





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**Iconographic Notes  
Addenda et Corrigenda  
to  
“An Inscribed Set of Five “Dhyāni”-Buddhas  
from the Palace Museum, Peking”**

**Oskar von HINÜBER**

**Abstract:**

Since the publication of an inscribed set of the “Five Tathāgatas” (usually called “Dhyāni-Buddhas”) in the previous issue of ARIRIAB, more evidence has come to light. In addition, one or two minor errors, misunderstandings and omissions concerning iconography in Appendix 2 to that article (quoted as “Inscribed Set” henceforth) were detected too late when the article was already in print. They are pointed out and corrected in the following. Moreover, some more examples of images of the Five Tathāgatas are collected that may be helpful when trying to iconographically define a Buddha image. Although still fairly limited, the following collection of material should be taken as a first small step towards a systematic survey of all pertinent iconographic features of the Five Tathāgatas. Therefore, the subsequent considerations do not aim so much at presenting new results, let alone spectacular ones, as to serve as a preliminary practical guide to the relevant material and, particularly, to assemble some typical images that are found widely scattered in various publications on different aspects of Indian Buddhist art.

**Keywords:**

Five Tathāgatas (“Dhyāni-Budhas”), iconography, animals as emblems of various Tathāgatas, seated Buddha images from north-western and north-eastern India between ca. 4<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries

A second incomplete set of four brass images of the Five Tathāgatas (Vairocana is missing) donated by the monk Jñānasādhuka, kept in the Potala in Lhasa and published by U. von Schroeder should have been mentioned in “Inscribed Set” but came to my notice too late.<sup>1</sup> The Tathāgatas are very similar in style and inscribed in the same script as those donated by the novice Yaśodeva published earlier. Because U. von Schroeder’s publication may not be available everywhere and because the inscriptions on these images deserve another look, the images of the Tathāgatas are re-published here (Figs. I–IV):<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> U. v. Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures from Tibet*. Volume I. India & Nepal. Hong Kong 2001, pp. 251–257, nos. 78A,B (Amoghasiddhi), 79A,B (Amitābha), 80A,B (Akṣobhya), 81A,B (Ratnasambhava). — It is my pleasant obligation to thank Cornelius Medvei, MA for correcting my English.

<sup>2</sup> The inscriptions have been read by Gourishwar Bhattacharya (1924–2019) and published in U. von Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures*. The text follows G. Bhattacharya’s readings with some minor corrections. Unfortunately, the plates in U. von Schroeder’s book do not allow the inscriptions to be seen and read in full. The *ye dharmā*-formula has been abbreviated.

1. (U. v. Schroeder plate 78) # *namo amoghāya svāhā* || *ye dharmā ... hy avadat ... mahāśravaṇaḥ* || *bhikṣu jñānasādhūkasya yad atra puṇyaṁ tad bhavatu ācāryopadhyāyamātāpitṛpūrvavaṅgama(m) kṛtvā sakalasatvarāśer anuttarajñānapālāvā[ ... ]<sup>3</sup> (sra) mahākālāya svāhā* || *a jambhalajalendrāya svāhā* || *om | sam | vasundhāratnānidām(!)akṛte* (read: *vasundhārāratnānid[h]ānakṣetre<sup>4</sup> svāhā*; correction of G.B.) *vasudhe śreyase dhārādevapūṇyakṛte svāhā* (read *tārādev[ī]-pūṇyakṣetre* ?)

2. (U. v. Schroeder plate 79) # *namo amitābhāya<sup>5</sup> svāhā* || *ye dharmā ... hy avadat ... mahāśravaṇaḥ* || *bhikṣu jñānasādhūkasya puṇyaṁ bhavatu | a | sra | mahākālāya svāhā | a | jambhalajalendrāya svāhā* || *a | nu | vasundhāratnānadānakṛte va svāhā* (read: *vasundhārāratnānid[h]ānakṣetre svāhā*; correction of G.B.; for °-nidāna-° read °-nidhāna-°) *prattā ...*

3. (U. v. Schroeder plate 80) # *mū | namo akṣābhya<sup>6</sup> svāhā* || *ye dharmā ... hy avadat ... mahāśravaṇaḥ* || *bhikṣu jñānasādhūkasya puṇya(m) bhavatu | tu | sra | mahākālāya svāhā | a | jambhalajalendrāya svāhā | a | vro | vasundhāratnānidānakṛve* (read: *vasundhārāratnānid[h]ānakṣetre svāhā*; correction of G.B.) *vasudhāsuyema* (mistake for *vasudhe śreyase [svāhā]* ? see 1. Amoghasiddhi)

4. (U. v. Schroeder plate 81) # *namo ratnasambhavāya svāhā* ||<sup>7</sup> *ye dharmā ... hy avadat ... mahāśramaṇaḥ* || *om ā hūṁ | bhikṣu jñānasādhūkasya yad atra puṇyaṁ tad bhavatu a | jambhalajalendrāya svāhā* || *a vasudhe svāhā | mahākālāya svāhā*

It is astonishing that the inscriptions are written fairly carelessly. Only the text on the pedestal of the image of Amoghasiddhi is complete with the mantras of Mahākāla, Jambhala as Jalendra and his consort Vasu(n)dhārā as well as Vasudhā and Dhārādevaputra (or perhaps rather Tārādevī). All other versions are either abbreviated or mutilated. This may be due to a miscalculation of the space available on the rim of the pedestal or to the wish to accommodate too much text. Only the inscription on the back of the pedestal of the image of Amoghasiddhi is split into two lines in order to gain sufficient space. However, even here the expected beginning *deyadharmo yaṁ* before *bhikṣu jñānasādhūkasya* is missing.

The correct version, which Jñānasādhuka had in mind, can be reconstructed tentatively as:

# *namo name of the Buddha svāhā* || *ye dharmā ... hy avadat ... mahāśrav(or: m)āṇaḥ* || *bhikṣu jñānasādhūkasya || yad atra puṇyaṁ tad bhavatu ācāryopadhyāyamātāpitṛpūrvavaṅgama(m) kṛtvā sakalasatvarāśer anuttarajñānapālāvāptaye || (sra) mahākālāya svāhā || a jambhalajalendrāya svāhā || om | sam | vasundhārāratnānidhānakṣetre svāhā || vasudhe śreyase tārādevī-pūṇyakṣetre svāhā*

The respective *mudrās* and *vāhanas* are identical with those of the Tathāgatas described in “Inscribed Set.” In addition, lotus flowers growing out of the back of the pedestal behind the Buddhas on both sides are preserved in the set of four, but complete only in the image of

<sup>3</sup> The correct text is *anuttarajñānapālāvāptaye* according to parallels in manuscripts such as the colophons to the Jñānālokāṁkāra etc., see O. v. Hinüber, “Rev. of N. Balbir and G. Ciotti, eds., The Syntax of Colophons. A Comparative Study across Pothi Manuscripts. *Studies in Manuscript Cultures* 27. Berlin & Boston 2022.” IJ 66. 2024, 81–101, particularly p. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Bhattacharya’s °-nidāna-° (following the inscription) should be corrected to °-nidhāna-°. The mantra of Vasu(n)dhārā is *om śrī vasudhārāratnānidhānakṣetre svāhā*.

<sup>5</sup> The inscription reads *amatābhāya* by mistake.

<sup>6</sup> Thus G. Bhattacharya; the inscription reads *akṣābhya*.

<sup>7</sup> The inscription begins with *ye dharmā ...*. As far as this can be seen on the image (U. v. Schroeder’s plate), there is not enough space for *namo ratnasambhavāya svāhā* which would be positioned at the far right of the back side of the pedestal. Although this part of the inscription is blurred and partly invisible (U. von Schroeder plate 81B) there is hardly enough space to accommodate another 19 *akṣaras* after *vasudhe*.

Ratnasambhava (plate 81 in U. von Schroeder). The lotus to the left of all Buddhas is crowned by a bell with a Vajra (*vajraghaṇṭā*)<sup>8</sup> and in the case of Ratnasambhava by a jewel (his emblem) on the right side. On the other hand, the halos of the images published in “Inscribed Set” are completely lost. However, holes in the backs of the pedestals of the Tathāgatas from the Palace Museum in Peking indicate that they, too, were adorned once by a perhaps similar floral decoration.

In spite of the great overall similarity of the images, the pedestals are designed in quite a different way with, e.g., the *vāhanas* being placed at the far ends of the pedestals of the images preserved in the Potala and not immediately beside the central figure as in those in the Palace Museum in Peking.

The overall impression is that the donation by the novice Yaśodeva is much superior in quality and richer in decoration with many inlaid semi-precious stones. Moreover, the inscriptions are in verses. In contrast, the monk Jñānasādhuka seems to have had lesser funds at his disposal for decorating his donation and for paying a more competent engraver which resulted in quite a number of significant mistakes in the inscriptions.

Both sets are important as examples for the iconography of the Five Tathāgatas, because the individual names mentioned in the inscriptions are combined with the *vāhanas* in the pedestals.

The loss Vairocana in the set in the Potala is particularly unfortunate, because only for this Tathāgata there are two alternative animals as *vāhanas*. In the set from the Palace Museum the Tathāgata Vairocana is characterized by lions, which is indeed standard. However, as it was pointed in “Inscribed Set” there is a variant with the lions being replaced by “griffins” (*vyālas?*).

It was overlooked in “Inscribed Set” that this rare feature can be seen in the oldest dated images of Vairocana that were both published simultaneously in the article “News from Palola” in the Karashima Memorial Volume.<sup>9</sup> Two griffins are positioned in the pedestal (upper tier “News from Palola,” Plate 14 figure 5) next to the atlant in the middle flanked by lions sitting on the far ends. Consequently, these images can be added to those listed in “Inscribed Set” under I. Vairocana as I. 4 and I.5. The total number of images showing this unusual iconographic feature thus rises to 5 examples.<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that all images of Vairocana with two griffins were found in ancient north-western India (Gilgit area [today Pakistan], Kangra valley). The images of Vairocana published in the Karashima Volume are, moreover, dated to the reign of the Palola Śāhi Surendrāditya (ruled approximately 625–640 [or 625–644/655]). Thus they are older by roughly half a millennium than both sets from the Potala (U. v. Schroeder) and the Palace Museum (“Inscribed Set”), where the griffins are replaced by lions. The preliminary conclusion that can be drawn from this evidence,

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<sup>8</sup>. Lost in the image of Amoghasiddhi.

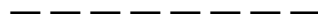
<sup>9</sup>. O. v. Hinüber, “News from Palola. The Jokhang and the Yong-he Inscriptions of Surendrāditya” (with Luo Wenhua), in: *Śāntamatiḥ: Manuscripts for Life — Essays in Memory of Seishi Karashima*. Tokyo 2023, 207–223, plates 13–21 (16 figures), plate 14 figure 5; plate 19 figure 11 and plate 20 figure 13 (modern replica).

<sup>10</sup>. The Buddha listed in “Inscribed Set” as II.2 Vairocana is also published by G. Fussman, “Chilas, Hatun et les bronzes bouddhiques du Cachemire,” in: *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan. Texts and Studies*, ed. by K. Jettmar. Vol. II. Mainz 1993, pp. 1–60 and 40 plates, particularly p. 49 with plate 34 without a discussion of the iconography, and, earlier, by P. Pal: *Indian Sculpture. A Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London 1988. Vol. II, p. 64 plate 9. Although the “winged griffins” are noted in the description, the image is defined as Śākyamuni.

therefore, is that this feature perhaps originated in or was limited to north-west India during the early second half of the first millennium.

So far, no textual source could be traced prescribing a griffin as the *vāhana* of Vairocana. The reason may be that the iconographic texts were composed in a region different from the place where this particular iconographic feature was popular or at a time, when the griffins had been replaced by lions.<sup>11</sup> In all later images of Vairocana, as it seems at present, a pair of lions in the pedestal represents his *vāhana*, which together with the *dharmacakrapravartana* / *bodhyagrī-mudrā*, characterize this form of the Buddha.

In addition to these two sets of the five Tathāgatas consisting of individual sculptures there are two examples of the group of five Tathāgatas sitting together in a line on the same pedestal. In the middle sits Vairocana displaying the *dharmacakramudrā* with lions supporting his lotus throne, immediately to his right Akṣobhya (elephant / *bhūsparśamudrā*) then Ratnasambhava (horse / *varadamudrā*) are shown and to his left Amitābha (peacock / *samādhimudrā*) and on his far left Amoghasiddhi (Garuḍa / *abhayamudrā*). One sculpture in late Kashmir style (11<sup>th</sup> century) is preserved in the Potala Collection. An inscription in Tibetan running along the pedestal states that these five Tathāgatas are the object of worship of the monk Lha'i Byaṅ chub.<sup>12</sup> The bronze of a corresponding group from Leh dated to the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> century is included in the Huntington Archive. (Fig. V)<sup>13</sup>



Individual images of the Five Tathāgatas can be determined as such with some confidence only when *mudrā* and *vāhana* are visible and concur as emphasized with much justification by T. E. Donaldson:<sup>14</sup> “[an] image cannot positively be identified as [a certain] Tathāgata unless his *vāhana* ... is also included [beside the *mudrā*].” This advice should be (but often is not) heeded at all times. However, not even the presence of respective features (*mudrā* and *vāhana*) in an image necessarily guarantees the correct definition. The way in which the animals as *vāhanas* are presented, their number (e.g., one, two three or even more elephants) and their position in the pedestal also matters. This was not fully understood when the material listed in Appendix 2 to “Inscribed Set” was assembled. For this reason apparent contradictions between *mudrā* and *vāhana* were erroneously pointed out.

In order to correct these misunderstandings and to facilitate identification, some more relevant material has been collected, and, keeping Donaldson’s advice in mind, presented in the following. The examples are arranged according and limited to the various *vāhanas* shown in their pedestals and characterizing the Five Tathāgatas as well as to their number in

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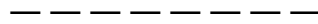
<sup>11.</sup> A similar reason is assumed for the ultimate disappearance of the Palola Śāhis and their realm from the collective memory of post-Gupta India, cf. O.v.Hinüber: *Die Palola Śāhis. Ihre Steininschriften, Inschriften auf Bronzen, Handschriftenkolophone und Schutzzauber*. Antiquities of Northern Pakistan 5. Mainz 2004, p. 73, cf. also P. Skilling: “Scriptural Authenticity and the Śrāvaka Schools. An Essay towards an Indian Perspective,” *The Eastern Buddhist* 41. 2010, pp. 1–47, particularly p. 9. It concurs with these observations that the Indian indigenous grammarians do not describe Gāndhārī.

<sup>12.</sup> U. von Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1 above, p. 139, plate 33.

<sup>13.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: [https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/huntington/show\\_detail.py?ObjectID=30036745](https://dsal.uchicago.edu/cgi-bin/huntington/show_detail.py?ObjectID=30036745), key word: Buddhist Bronzes.

<sup>14.</sup> T. E. Donaldson: *Iconography of the Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa*. Vol. I (Text), Vol. II (Plates). Delhi 2001, p. 100.

order to demonstrate the use of the respective animals as *vāhanas* (lion / griffin: Vairocana, elephant: Akṣobhya, horse: Ratnasambhava, peacock: Amitābha and Garuḍa: Amoghasiddhi) in Buddhist iconography in north-western and north-eastern India roughly between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>15</sup> In doing so it is hoped that the following specimens may help to avoid some of the pitfalls that can occur when attempting to identify individual Tathāgatas. The focus is laid on the animals that are depicted in the pedestals of metal images of sitting Buddhas,<sup>16</sup> because they can serve as a first indication as to which form of the Buddha a certain donor may have had in mind.



Already in canonical texts, the Buddha Śākyamuni is compared to various animals, among them lion, elephant and horse.<sup>17</sup> Most important is the lion, because the Buddha appears like the king of animals (*migarāja*, AN II 33,1-18), his preaching is likened to the lion's roar, and "lion" is even a designation of the Tathāgata.<sup>18</sup> The Tathāgata also takes a rest lying down on his right side like a lion.<sup>19</sup> All this is firmly rooted in the oldest texts. Therefore, it is no wonder that the Buddha sits on a lion-throne and that **the lion has become one of his emblems.**<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The remark in my review of "Y. Kasai: *Die uigurischen buddhistischen Kolophone*. 2008" in ZDMG 162. 2012, 241–245 = *Kleine Schriften* III. 2019, 1739–1743, p. 244 = p. 1742 that the Buddhas of the Bhadrakalpa share the same animals as *vāhanas* with the Five Tathāgatas is due to a gross misunderstanding. The lines 18–21 of the respective colophon refer to the so-called *mānuṣi-buddhas* while lines 22–25 describe the Five Tathāgatas (Kasai p. 107) and are not, as assumed in the review, connected, but refer to two different groups of Buddhas.

<sup>16</sup> The set of five Tathāgatas appears fairly frequently in the halo of stone sculptures of a Buddha where they are easily identified. The same is true for groups found in situ in a sanctuary, cf. "Inscribed Set," p. 53. Therefore, neither of these groups is taken into consideration.

<sup>17</sup> *nāgo vata bho samaṇo Gotamo ... sīho ... ājānīyo*, SN I 28,1-11 (Spk I 80,12-15).

<sup>18</sup> *sīho ti ... tathāgatass' etaṃ adbhavaṇaṃ ... yaṃ kho bhikkhave tathāgato parisāya dhammaṃ deseti idaṃ assa hoti sīhanādaṃ*, AN III 122, 4–7 = V 33, 4–7 "lion" is an appellation of the Tathāgata ... when, monks, the Tathāgata teaches the *dhamma* to an assembly, this is in the form of his lion's roar," on this use of the locative cf. O. v. Hinüber: *Studien zur Kasussyntax des Pāli, besonders des Vinaya-Piṭaka. Durchgesehener und korrigierter Nachdruck*. Studia Indologica Halensis Band 19, Halle 2022 (reprint 2024), § 293.

<sup>19</sup> *dakkhiṇena passena sīhaseyyam kappesi*, DN II 137,18 = SN I<sup>1</sup> 27,21 with the commentary describing this posture *sīho migarājā dve purimāpāde ekasmiṃ thāne, pacchimāpāde ekasmiṃ thāne thapetvā naṅguṭṭhaṃ antarasatthimhi pakkhipitvā purimāpādapacchimāpādanāṅguṭṭhānaṃ thitokāsaṃ sallakhetvā dvinnāṃ purimāpādanāṃ matthake sīsaṃ thapetvā divasaṃ pi sayitvā pabbujjhamāno na uttasanto pabujjhati. sīsaṃ pana ukkhipitvā purimāpādanāṃ thitokāsaṃ sallakheti. sace kiñci thānāṃ vijahitvā thitaṃ hoti: na tuhyam jātiyā ca sūrabhāvassa ca anurūpan ti anattamano hutvā tatth' eva sayati na gocarāya pakkamati*, Sv 574, 27–36 = Spk I 79, 7–16 "after having set his forefeet and his hind feet together in one place and put his tail between his thighs, he checks the position of the forefeet, hind feet and tail, lays down his head on his forefeet and having slept even during the day, awakes without any fear. He raises his head and checks the position of the forefeet etc. If something is disarranged, he thinks: 'This is not appropriate for your kind and your state as a hero,' is annoyed, and, continues to lay on the spot and does not go out for food."

<sup>20</sup> The Buddha on the lion-throne in medieval Eastern India is discussed in the excellent art-historical study by C. Bautze-Picron: *The Forgotten Place. Stone Images from Kurkihar, Bihar*. Delhi 2015, "The elephant and lion throne" (p. 53 and pp. 78–81). — If one wants to indulge in symbolism, the pair of lions supporting the throne connects the Buddha as *dharmarāja* to the *cakravartin* on the lion-throne, while the lion in the middle emphasizes his being a Buddha. These lions appear first in Mathurā. Their meaning is discussed by H. Härtel, "The Concept of the Kapardin Buddha Type of Mathura," in: *South Asian Archaeology 1983*. Naples 1985, pp. 653–678 = *Kleine Schriften*. 2018, pp. 234–259, particularly p. 669 = 250, cf. also H. Falk, "Small-Scale Buddhism," in: *Devadattīyam. Johannes Bronkhorst Felicitation Volume*. Bern 2012, pp. 491–517. The lion can be replaced by a Dharmacakra or a Bodhi Tree (figure 88 with p. 177 in R. C. Sarma: *Buddhist Art. Mathurā*

**I. Single lions** are, consequently, not rare as symbols of the Buddha Śākyamuni as, e.g., in the image from the Avery Brundage collection in the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco donated by the Sthavira Prajñāprabha erroneously mentioned in “Inscribed Set” under Addenda III.4. (Fig. VI and VIa)<sup>21</sup> This image showing a Buddha with the *bhūsparsāmudrā* and one lion in the centre of the pedestal is of course neither Akṣobhya (*bhūsparśa*) nor Vairocana (lion), but Śākyamuni sitting under the Bodhi Tree as indicated also by the leaves above his head.<sup>22</sup> The same is true for the image of an almost identical Buddha in the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) donated by the monk Vimalaprabha published by P. Pal, who in his catalogue of the collections of LACMA correctly draws attention to the sculpture in the Avery Brundage Collection.<sup>23</sup> The donor Vimalaprabha, characterized as a monk by his robe, replaces one of the columns supporting the pedestal between the central lion and the one supporting the throne.<sup>24</sup> (Fig. VII and VIIa) The similarity of style and the script used in both inscriptions together with the resemblance of the names of both monks (Prajñāprabha and Vimalaprabha) point to the same workshop and perhaps even to the same monastic community. Names ending in °-*prabha* are typical for the Mūlasarvāstivāda lineage.<sup>25</sup>

A third similar image is exhibited in the Seattle Art Museum.<sup>26</sup> This image is donated by a couple shown sitting in *añjali* on both sides of the lion in the centre of the pedestal. Unfortunately, the dedicatory inscription most likely containing the names of the donors cannot be read on the available photos. (Fig. VIII)

A fourth image dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century found in Kurkihar is preserved in the Patna Museum.<sup>27</sup> The Buddha holds his hands in the *bhūsparsāmudrā*. There is one lion in the middle of the pedestal flanked on each side by a lion supporting the Buddha’s seat. In spite of

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*School*. Delhi 1995). Therefore, the *cakra* replacing the lion is not necessarily one of the jewels (*ratna*) of the *cakravartin*, as H. Härtel thought, but may be another symbol for the Buddha with no connection to a worldly king. – An early sculpture of a Kuṣāṇa King sitting on a lion-throne is published by R. C. Sarma: *Mathurā School*, figure 14.

<sup>21</sup> The inscriptions reads: *deyadharmmo ya(m) : stha prajñāprabhasya*. (Fig. VIa) The abbreviation *stha* for *sthavira* was not recognised in “Inscribed Set” because *stha* was misread as *sva*. The image is also published in S. & J. Huntington: *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree: The Art of Pāla India (8<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> centuries) and Its International Legacy*. Seattle and London 1990, no. 16, commentary p. 141 foll., and in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate 40.

<sup>22</sup> The pedestal of a headless Buddha from Mathurā corresponds to this type with two lions on either side of the lion-throne and a third lion in the middle, R. C. Sarma: *Mathurā School*, as note 20 above, figure 95 with p. 182.

<sup>23</sup> P. Pal: *Indian Sculpture*, as note 10 above, Vol. II. p. 75 Plate 168 and and C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate 41. The inscription reads: *deyadharmmo ya(m) : vimalaprabhasya*. There are numerous examples of this type among the stone sculptures from Kurkihar (C. Bautze-Picron plates 1, 6, 7, 10, 25, 33, 34, 41, 42, 43, 290).

<sup>24</sup> In the description of both these very similar images in “Inscribed Set” the sculptures from Los Angeles and San Francisco were unfortunately blended into one image. This error is corrected here.

<sup>25</sup> W. Wassiljew: *Der Buddhismus, seine Dogmen, Geschichte und Literatur*. Erster Teil: Allgemeine Uebersicht. Aus dem Russischen übersetzt (von A. Schiefner). St. Petersburg 1860, S. 294 (p. 267 in the Russian original). This is also confirmed by the name of the well-known Vinaya teacher Guṇa-prabha.

<sup>26</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://art.seattleartmuseum.org/objects/6028/buddha-shakyamuni-triumphing-over-mara-and-calling-the-earth> (Seattle Art Museum, Collections, Asian Art, Buddha images): Eugene Fuller Memorial Collection, 39.35. It is accompanied by the following description: “ca. mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, Indian, Bihar, probably Kirkihar” (read Kurkihar).

<sup>27</sup> The image can be accessed online at: American Institute of Indian Studies (<https://www.indiastudies.org>) → Research Centres → Art & Archeology → Photo Archive → key word “Buddha” (image no. 541). It is published in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate B7, p. 611.

the missing halo perhaps decorated with leaves from the Bodhi Tree, the image can be identified as Śākyamuni. Two donors are kneeling at either side of the pedestal. (Fig. IX)

**II. Single lions** also occur in combination with the *dharmacakramudrā*. In “Inscribed Set” only one example is discussed under Vairocana I.1 with a lion shown in the pedestal and the *dharmacakramudrā* displayed. This Buddha from Jājpur is published by Donaldson, Vol. II, figure 227 with the comment that it “possibly represents Vajradharma” (Vol. I, p. 52; here Fig. X). This identification needs correction as suggested in “Inscribed Set.” First, as correctly observed by Donaldson, this is a composite image consisting of parts from two different sculptures joined by mistake. However, in contrast to Donaldson’s observation, it is not the left shoulder of the Buddha that has been added erroneously to the sculpture, but the right arm holding a *cakra*. Therefore, it seems as if the wrongly reconstructed Buddha is three-armed now. Once the third arm is removed, a two armed crowned Buddha re-appears. The small Buddha in the headgear justifies the suggested identification as Vairocana (see note 36 below).<sup>28</sup>

All stone images listed so far are decorated on both side by griffins, as are (probably many) more examples which are not discussed here.<sup>29</sup>

A Buddha displaying the *dharmacakramudrā* is classified by U. von Schroeder as Vairocana.<sup>30</sup> There is one lion in the centre of the pedestal flanked by a lay devotee (right side of the Buddha) and a monk on the left side, probably the donor and his *kalyāṇamitra*. The seat is not supported by lions. This is not sufficient evidence to identify the image, which also could depict any crowned Buddha, with Vairocana being only one choice. (Fig. XI)

**III. A pair of lions** together with the *dharmacakramudrā* usually characterizes the Buddha **Vairocana**. These are of course additional lions sitting on either side of and between the central figure and the lions supporting the throne.

An interesting image published by U. von Schroeder shows two lions flanking the central atlant with the griffins supporting the seat of the Buddha displaying *dharmacakramudrā* on the far ends of the upper tier of the pedestal.<sup>31</sup> (Fig. XII)

There is a second image preserved in the Rubin Museum, New York with the same arrangement of animals. The Buddha wears the typical cape and headdress known from images from the Palola Kingdom with quite an unusual crown.<sup>32</sup> (Fig. XIII) This rare arrangement of animals in the pedestal is different from the other early images with griffins instead of the lions discussed above. The effigies, which can be dated to the times of the

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<sup>28.</sup> A stone image of a Buddha without a crown from Kurkihar sitting under the Bodhi Tree on a throne supported by lions with a third lion in the middle is published in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate 62

<sup>29.</sup> Perhaps the oldest pedestal supported by a griffin is the fragment of a stone sculpture of a Bodhisatva from Mathurā. Only the lower left corner of the sculpture is preserved with a mutilated inscription containing the word *jdhisatva*, cf. R. C. Sarma: *Buddhist Art*, as note 17, figure 60 with p. 154 with further references.

<sup>30.</sup> U. von Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1, p. 117, plate 23 E, F.

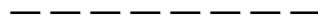
<sup>31.</sup> U. von Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1 above, p. 108 pl. 19A–C, who defines the image as Śākyamuni. The very similar pedestal of this image could have been the model for the one of a much later 17<sup>th</sup> century Buddha displaying *bhūsparśa*. The much inferior workmanship (compare the lions!) justifies among other arguments the late date given by U. von Schroeder, as note 1 above, p. 97, plate 16D,E.

<sup>32.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://www.himalayanart.org/search/set.cfm?setID=92&page=12> (Rubin Museum of Art, item no. 65423). It is dated to the 7th century.



Palola Śāhis, perhaps mirrors a transitional stage with the griffins moving away from their original position as *vāhana* of Vairocana to become decorative elements at the sides of various forms of the Buddha as in the images described above under nos. I and II.<sup>33</sup> Therefore it is impossible to guess, which form of Buddha the donors (on Fig. XII two monks sitting on either side of the Buddha) had in mind.<sup>34</sup>

**IV.** Lastly, there are two unusual images of a Buddha with **six or seven lions** respectively supporting the seat. Both display the *dharmacakramudrā*. The first image found in the Swat valley and dated to the 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century, is preserved in a private collection. (Fig. XIV) There are **six lions** in the pedestal. The minute meditating Buddha depicted in the crown is hardly visible and doubtful. If it is there, this should be an image of the Tathāgata Vairocana.<sup>35</sup> The second image was found in either Swat or Gilgit, is dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century and is kept in the Metropolitan Museum, New York. Altogether **seven lions** are shown in the pedestal.<sup>36</sup> (Fig. XV) The lions supporting the throne and the central lion are three, therefore the number of *vāhanas* of Vairocana is doubled as it were. The idea of having a lion in the centre of the pedestal instead of an atlant is as unusual in an image of Vairocana as is the total number of animals. The minute image of a meditating Buddha in the crown of the Tathāgata clearly recognizable here favours the identification as Vairocana.<sup>37</sup>



A second emblem of the Buddha is the **elephant**. Although the identification of the Tathāgata with an elephant (*nāga*) has also been attested since the canonical texts, this animal occurs in sculptures only rarely in comparison to the lion.

This concurs with the textual evidence. The best-known example identifying the Buddha with an elephant is perhaps a verse spoken by the Buddha himself in the story of the famous attack of the elephant Nālāgiri in one of Devadatta's attempts to kill the Buddha: *manussā ... evam āhaṃsu: na cirassaṃ vata bho, nāgo nāgena saṃgāmessatīti. atha kho bhagavā ... nālāgiriṃ hatthiṃ imāhi gāthāhi ajjhabhāsi: mā kuñjara nāgam āsado, dukkhañ hi, kuñjara,*

<sup>33.</sup> On the griffin as a decorative element cf. C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, "The leogryph and the elephant" (p. 48).

<sup>34.</sup> A rare piece giving the name of the Buddha depicted as Viśvabhu is the bronze of the *śākyabhikṣu* Acintamitra (dated AD 823/4), cf. ARIRIAB X. 2007, p. 40 with plates 4 and 5. Without the inscription the Buddha displaying *dharmacakramudrā*, but without a *vāhana* would have been classified as Śākyamuni – an excellent example for the pitfalls of iconographic identifications. A mutilated stone sculpture from Mathurā is identified as Buddha Kāśyapa by the inscription in the pedestal, cf. R. C. Sarma: *Buddhist Art*, as note 20, figure 149 with p. 216 foll. No iconographic features are recognizable.

<sup>35.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: [https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara/](https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara/,), seated Buddhas.

<sup>36.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: "The best of Swat Valley" in: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/2012/09/>. It is also included in U. von Schroeder: *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*. Hong Kong 1981, Plate 11G, p. 95 and in D. Klimburg-Salter: *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path. Esoteric Buddhist Art on the Trans-Himalayan Trade Routes*. Los Angeles 1982, plate 11, p. 96. It is unanimously identified as Vairocana. There is the effigy of a small meditating Buddha in the crown. This is Amitābha as one of the Five Tathāgatas, whose images are included in the crown of this Vairocana according to D. Klimburg-Salter (see above under II. Single lions in combination with *dharmacakramudrā*).

<sup>37.</sup> A pair of lions is depicted in each of the three niches of the pedestal of a Buddha from Kurkihar sitting under the Bodhi Tree and displaying the *bhūsparśamudrā*. The image is preserved in the Chandradhari Museum, Darbhanga, and published in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate 9.

*nāgam māsado*, Vin II 195,20–28\* “people ... spoke thus: ‘Soon, indeed, the elephant (*nāga* = Buddha) will come together with the elephant.’ Then the Lord ... addressed the elephant Nālāgiri with these three verses. ‘Do not attack, elephant, the elephant (*buddhanāgaṃ*, Sp 1275,24), for it is painful, elephant, do not attack (*mā āsado*) the elephant (*nāga* = Buddha).’”<sup>38</sup>

In art the Bodhisatva is depicted as an elephant for the first time at Bhārhut, when he enters his mother’s womb in her famous dream.<sup>39</sup>

**V.** The Buddha is depicted fairly frequently displaying *dharmacakramudrā* sitting under the Bodhi Tree of Śākyamuni<sup>40</sup> with **one elephant** in the middle of the pedestal. The identification of these images as Śākyamuni can be considered as certain.

**VI.** The same is true for the stone sculpture of Śākyamuni with **one elephant** in the centre of the pedestal displaying *bhūsparśamudrā* from the Heeramaneck Collection (now in the Cleveland Museum of Art) assumed in “Inscribed Set” under II.4 erroneously to be Akṣobhya. (Fig. XVI) In spite of the damaged right arm of the Buddha the *bhūsparśamudrā* is preserved. At both sides of the Buddha a smaller Buddha is standing. The same image is published with an exhaustive commentary and together a similar one from Northern Bengal (ca. 11<sup>th</sup> century) preserved today in the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts by S. & J. Huntington.<sup>41</sup> (Fig. XVII) Another similar stone sculpture from Kurkihār (9<sup>th</sup> century) with decorative griffins on both sides of the Buddha and erroneously classified as Akṣobhya in “Inscribed Set” II.6 is described by C. Bautze-Picron.<sup>42</sup> (Fig. XVIII) Furthermore, a corresponding brass image in “late Pāla style” (11<sup>th</sup> / 12<sup>th</sup> century) is preserved in the Potala Collection.<sup>43</sup> (Fig. XIX)

**VII.** If there are **two elephants** in the pedestal beside the lions supporting a Buddha displaying *bhūsparśamudrā* the image can be identified as Akṣobhya. While nos. II.4 and II.6 in “Inscribed Set” are to be removed, because these images do not show the Buddha Akṣobhya, a brass sculpture from Eastern India (Bodh Gayā?) can be added.<sup>44</sup> (Fig. XX) U.

<sup>38.</sup> On this verse see O. v. Hinüber: *Studien zur Kasussyntax des Pāli*, as note 18 above, § 93; cf. also *nāgo ti laddhanāmo sammāsambuddho*, Th-a III 9,35.

<sup>39.</sup> A. Foucher: *La vie du Bouddha d’après les textes et les monuments de l’Inde*. Paris 1949 (repr. 1987; abridged English version by Simone Brangier Boas: *The life of the Buddha according to the ancient texts and monuments of India*. Delhi 2003 (repr. 1972, 2003), p. 37 foll., cf. O. v. Hinüber, “La légende de la vie du Bouddha. Quelques pensées sur les recherches d’Alfred Foucher,” in: *Bouddhismes d’Asie. Monuments et Littératures. Journée d’étude en hommage à Alfred Foucher (1865-1952) réunie le 14 décembre 2007 à l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*. Paris 2009, pp. 141–151 (= *Kleine Schriften* III. Wiesbaden 2019, pp. 1330–1340), p. 143 = 1332, cf. also G. Verardi, “The Buddha-Elephant.” *Silk Road Art and Archaeology* 6. Papers in Honour of Francine Tissot. 1999/2000, pp. 69–74.

<sup>40.</sup> The shape of the leaves of the tree leaves no doubt that the *figus religiosa* (*aśvattha*) is meant.

<sup>41.</sup> S. & J. Huntington: *Leaves from the Bodhi Tree*, as note 21 above, Figure XV: no. 13, commentary pp. 136–139; on the three lines inscription which cannot be read from the available photos see *ibidem*, p. 138 note 13; and Figure XVI: no. 29 (coloured image), commentary pp. 155 foll.

<sup>42.</sup> C. Bautze-Picron: *The Art of Eastern India in the Collection of the Museum für Indische Kunst*. Monographien zur indischen Archäologie, Kunst und Philologie Band 12. Berlin 1998 [Rev.: O. v. Hinüber, WZKS 46. 2002, 287–289], no. 12 with p. 23, cf. also and in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate 31.

<sup>43.</sup> U. von Schroder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1, p. 269, no. 86C.

<sup>44.</sup> U. von Schroder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1, p. 267, plate 85A.

von Schroeder prefers an identification of this Buddha as Śākyamuni. However, two elephants can be distinguished in the pedestal, and the Buddha displays the *bhūsparśamudrā*. Consequently an identification as Akṣobhya seems to be more likely. Another Buddha image from a private collection (?) with the same features – (two elephants standing next to an atlant in the centre of the pedestal and *bhūsparśamudrā*) – is of uncertain provenance and date (Tibet ? post-Pāla-period?).<sup>45</sup> In the accompanying commentary the image is defined as Śākyamuni. The lions supporting the throne are erroneously called “leogryphs.” (Fig. XXI) Furthermore, a stone sculpture of Akṣobhya from Ratnagiri (9<sup>th</sup> century) published by T. E. Donaldson<sup>46</sup> can be added. The elephants are badly damaged, but still faintly recognizable. (Fig. XXII)

In spite of the lion in the centre of the pedestal flanked by elephants in a 10<sup>th</sup> century stone sculpture in the Indian Museum, Calcutta, and the *bhūsparśamudrā*, it seems to be prudent to hesitate in identifying an Akṣobhya here, because of the leaves of the Bodhi Tree above the head of the Buddha.<sup>47</sup> (Fig. XXIII)

Lastly, a late Pāla brass (?) image of Akṣobhya from Dolpo is published without further explanation by U. von Schroeder.<sup>48</sup> The unusual sequence of animals in the pedestal is elephant - lion - (six-armed deity?) - lion - elephant. (Fig. XXIV)

**VIII. A pair of elephants** is sitting at the far ends of the pedestal of a stone sculpture of a seated Buddha removed from cave 16 in Ajanṭā, whereas a pair of lions flanks the central *dharmacakra* between two deer.<sup>49</sup> Although the forearms are broken off, the damage on the chest of the sculpture points to the *dharmacakramudrā* position of the hands. This identifies the image as Śākyamuni. (Fig. XXV)

**IX.** It is unusual that **three elephants** support the seat of a Buddha as in a bronze in the Karachi National Museum (Huntington Archive photo no. 9600) dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>50</sup> (Fig. XXVI) As the Buddha displays the *dharmacakramudrā*, it is a Śākyamuni as stated in the accompanying description. The outer elephants replace the lions. A second example from the Swat Valley dated to the 9<sup>th</sup> century is preserved in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Buddha shows similar features but displays the

<sup>45</sup>. The image can be accessed online at: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/tibet/-buddhas-male-form/shakyamuni/seated-on-throne/> [Tibet Buddha on throne (6)].

<sup>46</sup>. T. E. Donaldson: *Buddhist Sculpture of Orissa*, as note 14 above, figure 132a and vol. I p. 108.

<sup>47</sup>. The image can be accessed online at: American Institute of Indian Studies (<https://www.indiastudies.org>) → Research Centres → Art & Archeology → Photo Archive → key word “Buddha” (image no. 1458). More examples of this type are published in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plates 11, 49, 50, 51. Sometimes a pair of lions is shown in the niche in the middle of the pedestal *ibidem* plates 12, 13, 16, 81. A single lion in the centre is flanked by two elephants without the pair of lions supporting the throne *ibidem*, plate 44. The Buddha sits under the Bodhi Tree and displays the *bhūsparśamudrā*.

<sup>48</sup>. U. von Schroeder: *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, as note 36 above, p. 171.

<sup>49</sup>. The image can be accessed online at: American Institute of Indian Studies (<https://www.indiastudies.org>) → Research Centres → Art & Archeology → Photo Archive → key word “Buddha” (image no. 481).

<sup>50</sup>. The image can be accessed online at: Swat Valley (post-Gandhara) Seated Buddhas (3) in: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara/page/3/>. The pedestal is also shown under the heading Swat Valley Style IV. Three elephants support the seat of a Vajrasatva in C. Bautze-Picron: *Stone Images*, as note 20 above, plate 178; on plate 177 a pair of elephants stands in the middle of the pedestal of a second Vajrasatva flanked by elephants on either side.

*bhūsparśamudrā*.<sup>51</sup> (Fig. XXVII) It is tempting to classify this image as Akṣobhya because of his *mudrā* and to take the outer elephants as his emblem, as it seems was done by the Metropolitan Museum at first. Comparison with the image in the Karachi Museum, however, proves that the correction in the description accompanying the effigy is entirely justified, although the reason given may not be correct.<sup>52</sup>

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The remaining animals symbolizing the Tathāgatas (horse: Ratnasambhava; peacock: Amitābha; Garuḍa: Amoghasiddhi) occur much more seldom, because they are not, at the same time, symbols of the frequently represented Buddha Śākyamuni.

**X.** A Buddha from the Swat valley in a private collection displaying the *varadamudrā* with his right hand and holding his robe in the raised left hand is dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>53</sup> (Fig. XXVIII) The pedestal is supported by **three winged horses**. Only the pedestal of this image is included in the collection “himalayanandbuddhistart” under “animals and mythical creatures”<sup>54</sup> without cross reference. The strange iconography seems to be unique so far. The horse as the animal of Ratnasambhava has been dealt with above.

**XI.** The **peacock** is the *vāhana* of Amitābha, who is also characterized by the *samādhi-mudrā*.<sup>55</sup> Besides being an emblem, peacocks may occasionally support a throne as decoration without any significance for iconography. One of the rare examples is a Buddha from the Swat Valley in a private collection dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> century displaying *varadamudrā* with his right hand and holding his robe in the raised left hand.<sup>56</sup> (Fig. XXIX) His throne is supported by **three peacocks**. A second a Buddha also from the Swat Valley dated slightly earlier to the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century preserved in the Pacific Asia Museum in Pasadena sits on a throne supported by **five peacocks**.<sup>57</sup> (Fig. XXX) In spite of the *varadamudrā* (Ratnasambhava) this image is identified with Amoghasiddhi by D. Klimburg-Salter, who takes the birds to be Garuḍas.<sup>58</sup>

The peacocks and other animals in the lower tier of the pedestal of the Buddha donated

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<sup>51.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/2012/09/>; cf. also U. von Schroeder: *Indo-Tibetan Bronzes*, as note 36 above, no. 11C, p. 94. In 1962 the bronze was still in the possession of the Wali of Swat; U. von Schroeder (following D. Barrett) also classifies the Buddha as Akṣobhya.

<sup>52.</sup> “Update 04/05/22: this is the crowned Buddha (Shakyamuni), Akshobhya would never wear a saṅghātī.”

<sup>53.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara/page/7>.

<sup>54.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara>.

<sup>55.</sup> Only the pedestal of an early stone sculpture found at Govindnagar / Mathurā survives. The inscription proves that this was an image of Amitābha once. Although the legs of an attendant are visible to the right of the Buddha, no specific iconographic features are extant, cf. R. C. Sharma: *Mathurā School*, as note 20 above, figure 146 with p. 214 foll.

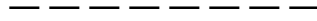
<sup>56.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara/page/6/> or: <https://www.christies.com/lot/lot-5416569>.

<sup>57.</sup> The image can be accessed online at: <https://himalayanbuddhistart.wordpress.com/category/all/swat-valley-post-gandhara/page/9/>. The throne with the peacocks is also shown in: <https://himalayanbuddhistart> under the rubric “animals and mythical creatures” without reference to the full image.

<sup>58.</sup> D. Klimburg-Salter: *The Silk Route and the Diamond Path*, as note 36 above, plate 83, p. 172.

by the *śākyabhikṣu* Bhadradharmā in the year 55 (Laukika = AD 679/80) displaying *samādhi-mudrā* and sitting on a throne between two stūpas are also only decorative. The sequence of animals is peacock - markhor - bull (?) - lion - bull (?) - markhor - peacock.<sup>59</sup> (Fig. XXXI)

**XII.** A rare example shows **two Garuḍas** in the pedestal as the emblem of Amoghasiddhi. The Buddha displays the *abhaya-mudrā*. There are no lions to support his throne. On top of the halo the head of a Garuḍa watches over the brass figure of this Tathāgata. The sculpture is dated to late Pāla times (11<sup>th</sup> century) and preserved in the Jokhang Collection in Lhasa.<sup>60</sup> (Fig. XXXII)



Among the few general conclusions that can be deduced from the material collected above is first of all perhaps the simple fact that the presence of a certain *mudrā* or *vāhana* alone is not sufficient for a reliable identification of an image. Only the correct combination of the two makes it possible to determine with a certain degree of confidence which Buddha the donors of a certain bronze or stone sculpture may have had in mind (cf. note 34).

Moreover, it is hardly surprising that the time and place when and where a bronze was cast matters. As briefly discussed above, it makes quite a difference if a sculpture was produced in the Palola Kingdom in north-western India (today Pakistan), which perhaps allows a glimpse into the formative phase of the iconography of the Five Tathāgatas, or if it was produced during Pāla-Sena times in the east, when the iconography was fully developed.

Another aspect is that even from the limited number of sculptures gleaned from widely scattered publications the impression is hard to avoid that Amitābha and Akṣobhya are particularly popular within the group of the five Tathāgatas. This impression is supported by epigraphic evidence from the Upper Indus<sup>61</sup> where the travellers first of all wrote down the names of both these Tathāgatas a couple of times (*namo kṣobhyāya* etc.), but once only

<sup>59.</sup> U. von Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1 above, p. 114, plate 22. The presence of two stūpas has of course nothing at all to do with the famous Prabhūtaratna episode in the Saddharmapundarīkasūtra as suggested by P. G. Paul: *Early Sculpture of Kashmir*. Enschede 1986, pp. 224–243 with plate 87 (quoted by U. von Schroeder). When the Buddhas Śākyamuni and Prabhūtaratna meet, there is only a single stūpa, cf. O. v. Hinüber, “The Saddharmapundarīkasūtra at Gilgit. Manuscripts, Worshippers, and Artists.” *Journal of Oriental Studies* (Hachioji) 22. 2012, pp. 52–67 = *Kleine Schriften* III. Wiesbaden 2019, pp. 1359–1374, particularly p. 60 = 1367 with plate 2 and “Three Saddharmapundarīkasūtra manuscripts from Khotan and their donors.” ARIRIAB 18. 2015, 215–234 = *Kleine Schriften* III. 2019, 1487–1509, p. 227 = 1499 with figure 6 (plate 20 / figure 5 = p. 1509).

<sup>60.</sup> U. von Schroeder: *Buddhist Sculptures*, as note 1, plate 82C, p. 261.

<sup>61.</sup> The relevant inscriptions are collected and discussed in O. v. Hinüber, “Buddhistische Inschriften aus dem Tal des Oberen Indus,” in: *Antiquities of Northern Pakistan. Reports and Studies*. Vol. I: Rock Inscriptions in the Indus Valley. Mainz 1989, pp. 73–106, particularly pp. 90–97. – It is remarkable that the name Amitābha is attested once as *amritābha* written thus for *amṛtābha* with a folk-etymological interpretation cf. D. Bandini: *Die Felsbildstation Thalpan II*. (Steine 31–195). Materialien zur Archäologie der Nordgebiete Pakistans Band 7. Mainz 2005, p. 83 stone 113:6 with commentary (Tafel 97). (Fig. XXXIII) The inscription is mentioned by S. Murakami, “Early Buddhist Openness and Mahāyāna Buddhism.” *Nagoya Studies in Indian Culture and Buddhism. Saṃbhāṣā* 27. 2008, pp. 109–147, particularly p. 130; on the name Amitābha cf. also J. Nattier, “The Names of Amitābha / Amitāyus in Early Chinese Translations (1).” ARIRIAB 9. 2006, pp. 183–190, particularly p. 188.

addressed Vairocana, while Ratnasambhava<sup>62</sup> or Amoghasiddhi are never mentioned.<sup>63</sup> This is no wonder given the enormous popularity of Amitābha and his paradise particularly in later Central and East Asian Buddhism.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62.</sup> Unless the name Ratnaśikhin is taken as an otherwise untested variant of Ratnasambhava in the list: *namo [ami]tābhāya tathāgatāya. namo ratnaśikhi[ṇ](e) tathāgatāya. namo śākyamunaye tathāgatāya. namo akṣobhyāya tathāgatāya. likhitam priyamitreṇa*, Chilās V stone 40:1-2 in: D. Bandini: *Die Felsbildstation Thalpan IV*. (Steine 451–811). Appendix: Katalog der Inschriften von Basha, Bazeri Das, Chilās IV, V, VI, Harban, Hodur-Süd, Khanbari und Minargah. Materialien zur Archäologie der Nordgebiete Pakistans Band 9. Mainz 2009, p. 251. A better image of the inscription can be found in O. v. Hinüber, “Buddhistische Inschriften,” as note 61 above, plate 191 and 192, which favours a reading *ratnaśikiṇa* instead of °-śikhis. The stone has been destroyed in the meantime.

<sup>63.</sup> The inscriptions containing the names of Tathāgatas are unfortunately never accompanied by images. It is, however, remarkable, that in Thalpan the name Amitābha (stone 110:6) is found in a group of inscriptions at the western end and that of Akṣobhya (stone 178:5) on the eastern end of the same rock barrier. In the middle, near to Amitābha (ca. 20 m to the east) the name of Vairocana (stone 112:22) is inscribed on the rock. The distance between Vairocana and Akṣobhya is ca. another 500 m, see map in MANP 7, as note 61 above, p. XIV.

<sup>64.</sup> Cf. *Hôbôgirin. Dictionnaire encyclopédique du Bouddhisme d’après les sources chinoises et japonaises*, éd. par S. Lévy & J. Takakusu. Tokyo 1929 s. vv. Amida and Ashuku / Akṣobhya. Amitābha has been attested in India since Kuṣāṇa times (see note 55 above). On early literary evidence for Akṣobhya and his paradise Abhirati in Kharoṣṭhī documents see I. Strauch, “More Missing Pieces of Early Pure Land Buddhism: New Evidence for Akṣobhya and Abhirati in an Early Mahāyāna Sūtra from Gandhāra.” *The Eastern Buddhist* 41. 2010, pp. 23–66 quoted in “Inscribed Set” p. 48, note 2.



O. v. Hinüber, "Iconographic Notes. Addenda et Corrigenda to "An Inscribed Set of Five "Dhyāni"-Buddhas ..."

Fig. I Amoghasiddhi (U. von Schroeder, plate 78)



Fig. II Amitābha (U. von Schroeder, plate 79)



Fig. III Akṣobhya (U. von Schroeder, plate 80)



Fig. IV Ratnasambhava (U. von Schroeder, plate 81)





## PLATE 2

Fig. V Five Tathāgatas from Leh (Huntington Archive)



Fig. VI Śākyamuni (Asian Art Museum, San Francisco)



Fig. VIa Inscription



Fig. VII Śākyamuni (LACMA)

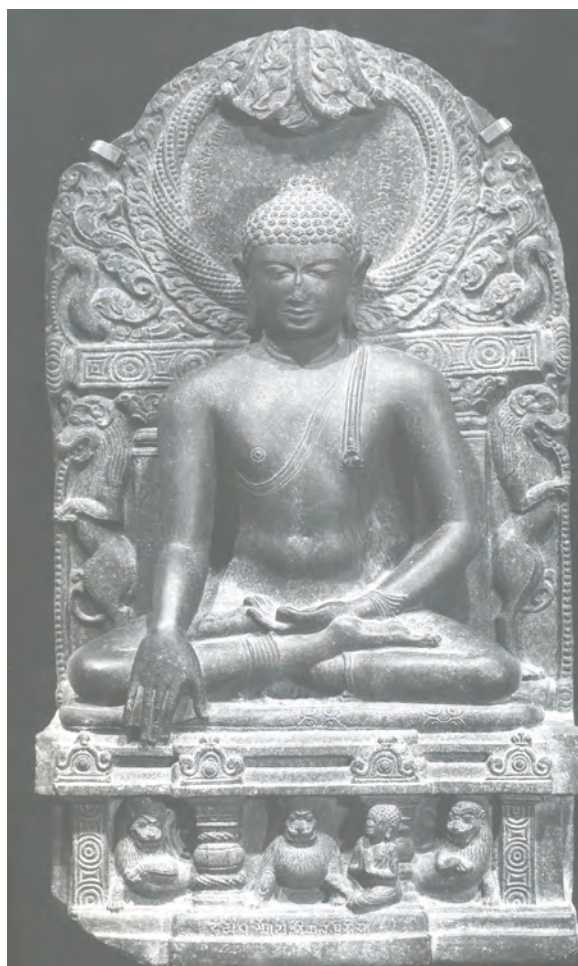


Fig. VIIa Inscription

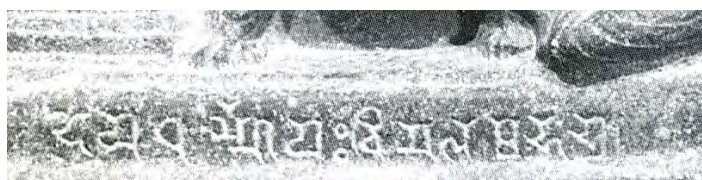




Fig. VIII Śākyamuni (Seattle Art Museum)



Fig. IX Śākyamuni, Kurkihar (Patna Museum)



Fig. X Vairocana, Jājjpur



Fig. XI Buddha (U. von Schroeder, plate 23E)





**PLATE 4**

Fig. XII Vairocana (U. von Schroeder, plate 19A)



Fig. XIV Vairocana (Private Collection)



Fig. XIII Vairocana (Rubin Museum)



Fig. XV Vairocana (Metropolitan Museum, New York)





Fig. XVI Śākyamuni (Heeramaneck Collection, Cleveland Museum of Art)



Fig. XVII Śākyamuni (Huntington Collection, Virginia Museum of Fine Arts)



Fig. XVIII Śākyamuni (Museum für Indische [Asiatische] Kunst, Berlin)



Fig. XIX Śākyamuni (Potala Collection)





**PLATE 6**

Fig. XX Akṣobhya (Potala Collection)



Fig. XXII Akṣobhya, Ratnagiri



Fig. XXI Akṣobhya, Unclear provenance (Private collection [?])



Fig. XXIII Akṣobhya (American Institute of Indian Studies, Indian Museum, Calcutta)





Fig. XXIV Dolpo, Lañ dGon-pa (U. von Schroeder, 1981, p. 171) Fig. XXV Śākyamuni (American Institute of Indian Studies, Buddha 481; Ajañṭā Cave 16)



Fig. XXVI Karachi National Museum (Huntington Archive)

Fig. XXVII Swat Valley (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York)





# PLATE 8

Fig. XXVIII Swat Valley (Private Collection)



Fig. XXX Rantnasambhava (?) Swat Valley (Pacific Art Museum, Pasadena)



Fig. XXIX Ratnasambhava (?) (Private Collection, Swat Valley)

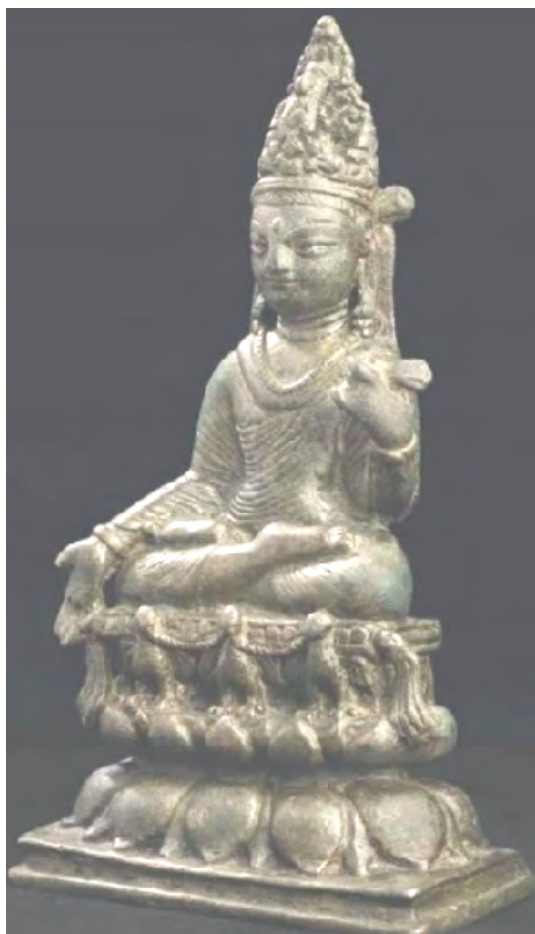


Fig. XXXI Buddha of Bhadracharya (U. von Schroeder, plate 22)



Fig. XXXII Amoghasiddhi (Jokhang Collection, Lhasa)



Fig. XXXIIa Detail of Fig. XXXII (pedestal)



Fig. XXXIII *namo amritābhā<ya> tathāgatāya*, Thalpan (Upper Indus) stone 113:6

